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**THE ACHIEVEMENT OF POTENTIAL: AN
EXPLORATION IN EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL
CONTEXTS**

BY

ANNE MCARTHUR

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED AS PART OF
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PHD DEGREE IN
EDUCATION.**

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ABSTRACT

The Achievement of Potential: an Exploration in Educational and Social Contexts outlines a qualitative study conducted in the North East of Scotland within the context of Scottish Education.

This study had four purposes: (1) to explore the meaning of the concept of potential; (2) to consider the factors affecting the achievement of potential; (3) to explore the conditions necessary to enable all children achieve their potential; and (4) to identify implications for Scottish education policy and practice.

The concept of potential presented in the literature was diverse – different constructs were generated at different historical times and within different disciplinary frameworks. Common features suggest that potential is something that everyone is born with and everyone achieves to some extent. It is suggested that potential can change throughout life because of influences from social contexts, personal relationships and cultural factors.

Those who participated in the empirical study had a complex and rich understanding of the term. They understood the concept to refer to people maximising the development and use of a range of capabilities. The three key factors identified and which interacted were: the children themselves with their capabilities, aptitudes and attitudes, the schooling system and the home and wider social, cultural context. With respect to teachers and parents, differences in their values, perceptions of the purposes of education, power differentials and community identity emerged as aspects of the

educational and social contexts impinging on relationships with pupils and their level of school engagement.

The conditions necessary for the achievement of the fullest potential for all children and the barriers preventing an increasing proportion of children achieving their potential within the established educational system are identified and discussed.

Educational strategies to promote the greatest possible amount of shared perceptions and values and harmonious interaction among the children themselves, their educational context and their social context to allow the children to develop a secure identity are suggested.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This study is based on an investigation into the achievement of potential in the context of Scottish Education. It stems from concern with respect to the changes, and the drivers of these changes within the educational system, which are aimed at the improvement of educational outcomes for all. The interest in the concept of potential arose from observations of the current pressures in Scottish education to raise the standards of achievement of pupils in both the secondary and the primary sectors. These pressures come from a variety of sources including (a) the international league tables such as TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS (2007) where Scotland does well in some aspects and less well in others; (b) the concept that a well educated and competent workforce is seen as a national asset; and (c) importantly the evidence from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) which shows that pupils in schools with similar demographic characteristics achieve a range of results. Evidence thus suggests more pupils could do better in Scottish Schools than they are currently doing.

'How Good is Our School' was published 2002 and its latest edition of quality indicators are today the key criteria for measuring school effectiveness, including pupil achievement, by local authorities and HMIe. In recent feedback from HMIe, schools' exam results have been compared and contrasted with schools that have similar demographic characteristics. In the minds of many professionals and laymen, and certainly in the public press, the exam criteria have become the criteria for a good school. However, the HMIe have also commented on achievement beyond the academic curriculum in their reports on schools. In addition to the drive to raise academic

standards which is common to many countries, as the responses to the international surveys show (TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS, 2007), there is a move away from any educational thinking or practice which suggests that only academic achievement is valued and that some children are more intelligent and in some way more deserving within the educational system. This is shown in the present drive for inclusion, aspirations towards equality and fairness, the promotion of citizenship and entrepreneurship, and the valuing all of children.

The SCCC (1996) in 'Teaching for Effective Learning' suggested that young people have a greater potential for learning than is commonly recognised and that schools and individual teachers could dramatically influence the extent, the quality and the attitudes towards learning in later life, and so a new concept, potential, was added to the commonly used professional vocabulary of educators.

It is now common to see in almost all schools the following type of statement:

"Our main aim is to improve, continually, the quality of learning opportunities for each pupil in all areas of the curriculum to allow everyone to develop to their full potential."

(Primary School, 2003)

"We aim to encourage each child to achieve his/her potential through structured, stimulating teaching."

(Primary School, 2003).

The school aims:

"To provide a happy stimulating environment in which pupils feel valued and are encouraged to achieve their full potential."
(Primary School, 2003).

The aims and values of an Academy:

"To enable all pupils to achieve their academic potential,

To ensure that some pupils do not prevent others from fulfilling their potential."

(Secondary School, 2003)

1.2 Achieving Potential as described in the Literature

The meaning of potential and how it might be achieved has been discussed across a number of different disciplines over many years. Influenced by the predominant thinking of the time, theories have waxed and waned in popularity and changed in their focus and rationale. If one is on a quest to achieve potential it can be seen as a personal journey linked to an inner state of awareness of the process. It has been said by some philosophers (May, 1993) that those who attain enlightenment or whatever is the pinnacle of their journey have achieved their fullest potential.

To consider how the journey can be achieved, the writing on consciousness and the relationship of the mind to the body appears to be helpful. Ornstein (1991) believed neural selection must happen because genes specified only potential; Dennett (1991), described the process as the workings of a conscious machine and Crick (1994) emphasised the training of the brain to grasp ideas that were beyond normal experience.

The behaviourists in contrast looked at the observable actions rather than inner events of the mind. Watson (Cohen, 1979) saw man as an assembled organic machine ready to run and Pavlov and Anrep (1927), appeared to indicate that given the optimum application of rewards and punishments, humans could be trained to achieve almost anything.

The literature on intelligence offers insight into yet a different school of thought. In the early 20th century Binet (Plucker, 2003) devised the first IQ tests in an effort to measure cognitive intelligence to determine who was 'uneducable'. Development of instruments to measure intelligence followed until the present when sophisticated and accurate tests are used to measure cognitive functions. Whether the capacity measured derived primarily from genetic inheritance or the effects of the environment led to a long standing debate among theorists and practitioners. Many child development psychologists hold the view that cognitive functions develop through distinctive and identifiable stages as the human matures and the process is described by White (2004) as similar to the biological unfolding between two poles from seed through to mature specimen in the physical and the mental world. In contrast some psychologists addressed the issue of personal growth down the years in what is termed the human potential movement. Personal growth they say is central to this discipline and is concerned with understanding inner states of being as well as modifying outer forms of behaviour (James, 1902; Jung, 1964; Drury, 1989; Maslow, 1968). In contrast, Vygotsky (1978) and others have investigated the influences of social interactions as key elements in the extent to which development takes place. Rogoff (2003) considered that to understand the achievement of potential it is essential to understand the development of the wider cultural institutions and practices in which people participate.

The academic research and philosophical thinking on the concept of potential clearly has a rich and complex past history. However, there has been no questioning of the meaning of the word as it is applied and widely accepted within Scottish education. The key issues and concepts arising through the review of the literature formed the basis for the exploration of the perceptions of the study participants, and later for the interpretation of some of the findings.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The author's interest led to this study of the achievement of potential: an exploration in the educational and social contexts of schools in the North East of Scotland. The questions considered related to the meaning of potential for those who provide the educational setting for young people in Scottish Schools. Was potential just another buzz word, obfuscating, professional psychobabble, or did it have a meaning which pointed towards specific activities in the classroom or the school? What did it mean in the context of parents' ideas of effective education in the schools? What did it mean with respect to parents' aspirations for their children's future lives?

The purposes of the study were therefore as follows:

- to explore the understanding of potential;
- to consider the factors perceived to affect potential;
- to consider the conditions perceived necessary for the achievement of potential;

and

- to consider the implications of the findings for policy and practice.

1.4 Design of the Fieldwork

The study was carried out by literature review and fieldwork. The fieldwork used an iterative approach as advanced by Guba and Lincoln (1998). This approach was chosen as it allowed the opportunity to talk to the widest possible range of stakeholders in education to gain their views, opinions and beliefs and to discuss the issues they considered relevant. At the end of each round of fieldwork, conclusions were drawn which influenced the design of the next round of fieldwork. In total, there were four rounds of data gathering.

Round one comprised a brief pilot study in the form of a series of unstructured interviews with educationalists and parents using grounded theory (Cresswell, 1998). The sample comprised a range of people centrally involved in education. The participants were asked what they thought potential was, the factors that affect children achieving their potential and the conditions necessary to allow children achieve their potential. The data was analysed using procedures advanced by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Round two was a series of semi-structured interviews again using grounded theory (Cresswell, 1998). The sample comprised a range of people centrally involved in education including school pupils. The participants were given the context of the study and asked to respond using key headings developed from round one – the child, the school environment, parents/home environment and the community. The primary pupils were asked a series of questions with prompts as required concerning their likes and dislikes of school and what helped them to do as well as they possibly could. The data

was again analysed using procedures advanced by Miles and Huberman (1994) for the analysis of qualitative data.

A second series of semi-structured interviews were held in round three this time with parents again using grounded theory (Cresswell, 1998). The purpose was to gain their views on potential and to generate a framework to bring together the parents' views on how well they considered their children were achieving through the school system. The interviews focused on a series of questions on the family, the home environment, the school environment, and the community. The form of the interview and the questions asked were based on the findings of round two. The data was analysed as in rounds one and two.

The aim of the final round was to explore in more depth, the divergent and alternative ways of thinking about potential, the factors affecting its achievement and the conditions necessary for its achievement. For this a focus group method was seen as a useful tool for exploring people's opinions and underlying thoughts, allowing collaboration and developing discussion (Billson, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). To initiate discussion within the focus groups it was decided to use vignettes (Finch, 1987, Hazel, 2002,) to elicit perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Parents and teachers were approached in two areas of the council which had different demographic profiles and four focus groups set up in each area (two teacher groups, one secondary and one primary and two parent groups). The data were analysed in two ways. In the first, the focus group transcripts were compared and contrasted teachers with teachers, parents with parents and community with community. The second method employed discourse analysis (Wetherell et al., 2001) to explore underlying frameworks of understanding and

perspectives on which the meaning of potential was built, the factors affecting its achievement and the conditions for its promotion.

1.5 Layout of the Thesis

The layout of the thesis is presented as follows:

Chapter two comprises the main literature review and is divided into three sections relating directly to the purposes of the study. The first section considers the concept of potential through an exploration of writings in a range of disciplines touching on aspects of potential limited by birth or genes, aspects limited or enabled by circumstances, and aspects unlimited or even determined by God. The second section considers information advanced to identify factors, which may affect the achievement of potential, exploring these within both educational and social contexts. The third section considers views on the conditions necessary for the achievement of potential exploring individual conditions, school conditions and those of the home and the wider community. The fourth section discusses recent policy initiatives in Scottish educational publications. The final section describes the study's place in nested systems theory.

Chapter three provides a rationale for the research design and methodology: the type of study undertaken, the selection of the informants and the choice of the study locations. The methodology chosen for the study, following an iterative process of returning to the field to gain more understanding is explained. The methods selected for the four rounds of data collection are discussed, and those chosen for the data analysis explained. Finally the design of each of the four rounds of fieldwork is described with its methods, sample and analysis.

Chapter four describes the fieldwork processes and presents the analysis and initial interpretation of the results. The findings of each round of the study are reported with interpretations that were used to inform the next round of enquiry. The findings from the pilot exploration of round one suggested that the concept of potential and its achievement included an extensive range of characteristics of the child and the school system. In addition to features of the educational context, the characteristics of the parents and the home, and community factors were also identified as important but responses on these features lacked the deep, rich information necessary for understanding this complex set of ideas and how they interacted. All of these were explored further in round two.

In response to the exploratory questions and prompts in round two of the data gathering, the respondents appeared to give views from their professional, personal and cultural stances. Three main overarching themes emerged from the analysis as the factors affecting learning potential, (a) the specific characteristics of the child, (b) the characteristics of the educational environment and (c) the characteristics of the social environment. The descriptions of the characteristics of the children and their needs with respect to achieving potential were rich and detailed and the conditions affecting the children's learning potential were seen as biological, physical/aesthetic, emotional and social/interpersonal. Three themes emerged which were specifically associated with the educational environment, (a) the characteristics – both personal and professional – of the teachers, (b) the teaching and learning strategies in the classroom, and (c) the internal school environment.

The findings also indicated views that there were key conditions necessary for the achievement of potential in the wider social environment. These were related to the attitudes of the parents and their expectations, and the home environment provided for the child or young person. The nature of the relationships between the parents and school was also highlighted as a key aspect of the educational success of the child. However, there were clearly tensions between the attitudes and lifestyles of some parents and the views of school staff on what were effective social contexts outside the school for the support of learning within it. The final factor that was seen as influential in the achievement of potential, was the community and its values. From the findings it was clear that the local area in which the study was undertaken might have a history and a culture of its own that affected the way the people perceived the achievement of their children's learning potential.

It was considered that in retrospect, because of the sampling arrangements, the reported findings possibly reflected the views of respondents, both teachers and parents, who were comfortable with the present school systems. It was decided that round three of the study should consider in greater depth a wider range of parents' views on the parents/home environment, the school and community factors associated with learning potential and the conditions for its promotion which emerged from rounds one and two, and to explore further and in greater depth their views as parents of what was happening in the study area schools.

The findings from round three extended the themes from rounds one and two with an emphasis on the parental perspectives and introduced two additional themes: the influence of the peer group and the importance of relationships. The learning of the

child at the centre of a matrix was seen to be influenced by relationships with the teacher, the peer group and the family within a given school system. This approach recognised the social constructivist nature of learning, with the development of the individual being heavily scaffolded by pupils' interactions and engagement with others immediately around them. However, the wider social context in the form of the characteristics of the catchment area of the secondary school were also identified as critical in shaping learning and life outcomes. Aspects of the cultural characteristics of the district were therefore the focus for further enquiry.

The final phase of the fieldwork was accordingly set in two contrasting social and cultural districts in the study area (identified later as Area F and Area B), selected on the basis of their different demographic characteristics (Section 3.7.5.1). The final round of data collection adopted a focus group methodology with the use of vignettes in order to evoke non-confrontational discussions, particularly with respect to the perceived role of the community, and family contexts and values, in promoting achievement of potential.

Overall, differences emerged between the views of secondary teachers in the two different areas. While one group of secondary teachers expressed the view that there had to be a rethink of the education system to meet the needs of the people they were failing, the second group from a different area were of the opinion that the pupils had to fit the system. Primary teachers of both areas had a common wish that priorities be placed across a wider vision of education not just academic subjects. Teachers in both sectors held the common view that the parents had to take some responsibility for the education of their children at least until they were sixteen years old.

The parents in both areas expressed a keenness to be involved in the education of their children and wanted more information on what they needed to know to make a partnership with the school work. They wanted a role in the education of their children that gave them some decision-making powers. A diversity of views emerged, but the analysis identified six key themes which were informing the thinking and discourses of the participants. These were conceptions of (a) the purposes of education, (b) the nature of the school system, (c) the community characteristics and relationships, (d) the role of parents, (e) the locus of power, and (f) the concept of identity.

The results provided two contexts within which factors contributed to the achievement of potential: an educational context and a social context, interacting to determine the complex social setting within which the individual child's identity and potential is developed. The adult players in these contexts, the teachers and the parents, display a variety of identities and exercise power over each other, frequently generating conflict, while professing a yearning for a real partnership to pursue their common goals in shaping the emerging identity and the successful development of the child.

Chapter five discusses the findings of each stage of the study and relates these to the literature and to theories of learning. The study of the literature found potential to be a complex concept but concluded that potential can be considered as something everyone is born with and everyone achieves to some extent. Potential can change throughout life because of influence from the social context, personal relationships and cultural factors. The key factors identified were the pupils themselves with their capabilities, aptitudes and attitudes, the schooling system and the home and wider cultural context. It appears that the word 'potential' has not merely taken on the meaning previously given to

‘intelligence’ in the minds of educators and parents. The descriptions given by those who participated in the study showed their recognition that people are unique human beings with abilities, aptitudes and attitudes in a variety of fields – physical, mental, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual. They recognised the concept to be that of people maximising the development and use of a range of capabilities.

The possibility of pupils achieving their fullest potential within the traditional educational system, and the effects of changes made and sought by recent policy initiatives is discussed. Recent policy initiatives set out to make education more responsive to all but the reality indicated by the data suggests there are barriers preventing the transformation taking place from a selective, elitist educational system serving only a minority, to one in which the majority of pupils may expect to attain their fullest potential. The barriers identified are discussed using a situated perspective on learning and the implications for changing the nature of the learning contexts for both teachers and pupils are explored.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Potential

2.1.1 Introduction

The potential of school pupils is the focus of this thesis. 'Potential' is not a technical word confined to use by educationalists. It is frequently used in a wide range of communications – broadcasts, newspapers, novels and formal reports, and has been the topic of interest in a range of historical texts. In the Chambers Concise Dictionary (1985), 'potential' is described as "something, which is possible but not yet actual, something which is capable of being or becoming, an ability which is latent but unrealised." Roget's Thesaurus (Thesaurus.com, 2007) states that "the family, with which the concept of potentiality is affiliated includes possibility, capacity, power, tendency, likelihood and still others."

In recent years, the word 'potential' has been used extensively in the field of Scottish education. In its publication 'Teaching for Effective Learning' the SCCC (1996) argued persuasively that young people have much greater potential for learning than is commonly recognised and that schools and individual teachers can dramatically influence the extent, the quality and the attitudes towards learning in later life. Since then the word has become commonplace in educational discourses in Scotland.

This chapter reviews the literature relating to the four purposes of the study: (1) to explore the meaning of potential, (2) to consider the factors which influence potential, (3) to consider the conditions necessary for its achievement, and (4) to reflect on the implications for educational policy and practice.

2.2 The Meaning of Potential

The study of potential has been the focus of intense philosophical interest and the subject of philosophical controversy from ancient times to the present, and within a range of disciplines. The first objective of this study is to gain an overview of the concept of potential from a broad perspective. Although the review includes both primary and secondary sources, with respect to this objective the literature mainly comprises secondary sources which offer a broad view of potential as understood and developed through history.

Early theorists have considered and argued about the achievement of the potential of an individual to be (a) limited by birth or genes, (b) equal but limited by circumstances, or (c) unlimited, as determined by God and in some areas it is considered that those who attain illumination, enlightenment or whatever the personal pinnacle of their religion have achieved their potential. However, the schools of thought reviewed here focus on aspects likely to be congruent with young people achieving their potential in educational and social contexts. They are: the functionalist/materialist studies of consciousness, the behaviourist movement, intelligence studies, child development theories, human development and social cultural theories. A brief overview of literature from these disciplines now follows.

2.2.1 Functionalist/Materialist Studies of Consciousness

This section reviews the writings on consciousness and the relationship of the mind to the body. Although the writers tended not to use the term 'potential' the appropriateness of their inclusion are illustrated in the links made in their work between the

development of intellectual skills, the genetic makeup and the environment of individuals.

Papineau and Selina (2000) raised the question of a definition for consciousness. However, they gave examples of consciousness rather than definitions because they considered no objective scientific definition seemed able to capture the essence of consciousness. They saw as a challenge the question of how subjective consciousness fits into the objective world and in particular how it relates to materialist goings on in the brain.

Happold (1970) described people as lonely beings contained in the brief span between birth and death, an insignificant bundle of atoms in a vast frightening impersonal universe soon to return to dust and be known no more. Descartes (1637, reported in Papineau & Silina, 2000) came to the conclusion that human knowledge depends on the brain and nervous system. He proposed that there exists an intrinsic set of abilities through which the mind directs the automation of the body. Ornstein (1991) believed neural selection must happen because genes do not specify an exact structure, only potential. Because the environment is so different for different circumstances, he said, each brain develops in different ways. Through neuronal selection, he considered, the cells in the brain that 'strike a match' with the environment thrive, those that do not fall into disuse. There are therefore an infinite number of potential forms of mind. Ornstein also believed that everyone possesses a system of many small unconscious minds each with its own programme. Each person is like a multiple personality, organised and controlled to a limited extent by the conscious self. The most basic talents concern

immediate survival, the more complex concern adapting to the world as it changed; the most elaborate concern the ability to reason and the sense of the self.

Dennett (1991) described humans as complicated evolved machines made of organic molecules rather than metal and silicon, and as one is conscious so there are conscious machines. The general idea, he said, was that after a certain amount of pre-processing has occurred in the early or peripheral layers of the perceptual system, the tasks of perception are completed. He described the brain as the headquarters, the location of the ultimate observer. Crick (1995), argued that brains have evolved and developed so that the individual can deal with the many concepts related to the everyday world. Well-trained brains grasp ideas about phenomena that are not part of normal experience. Brains, he said, evolve mainly to deal with one's body and its interactions with the world. Johnson-Laird (1988), a functionalist like Crick, suggested that the brain is a mechanism for highly complex parallel processing. Jackendoff (1987), a functionalist and a cognitive scientist, said he believed the mind to be an information processing system.

2.2.2 The Behaviourist Movement

In contrast to the writers on consciousness, behaviourists such as Wundt (Cohen 1979), Watson (1958), Pavlov and Anrep (1927) and Skinner (1974) focussed on observable actions rather than on inner events of the mind or personality. Wundt, who founded the first psychology laboratory in Leipzig in 1879, believed that the elements of consciousness can be dissected out by introspection in much the same manner that chemists analyse substances into their basic chemical constituents. Like Wundt,

Watson, (in Cohen, 1979) dismissed previous studies and reflections on consciousness and saw its study as a purely objective, experimental branch of natural science. He thought of man as an assembled organic machine ready to run.

Pavlov and Anrep (1927) identified a difference between American behaviourists and Russian behaviourists. The Americans were interested merely in the external stimuli and responses while the Russians were also interested in the brain activities taking place between the stimulus and the response. Pavlov considered that learning was linked to people's emotions, likes, dislikes, fears, and hates, over which they have little conscious control. Skinner's work (1974) showed how rewards strengthen behaviour, punishment suppresses behaviour and non-reinforcement extinguishes an established pattern of responses. He generalised widely, from the simple activities of lower organisms to human behaviour such as language, personality and even complex social and political conduct. His theory suggested that given the optimal application of rewards and punishments, humans and animals can be trained to achieve almost anything.

2.2.3 Intelligence Studies

The literature on intelligence offers insight into different schools of thought which had significant influence on the educational systems of the West. The measurement of intelligence might be considered by some to be a baseline for the achievement potential if not another word for potential. For much of the 20th century, psychologists made efforts to define intelligence and to measure it. At the start of the 20th Century Alfred Binet (Plucker, 2003) devised the first tests to measure intelligence. Binet was concerned to find those students who were 'uneducable,' within the mainstream school

system, in order to remove them from the public schools and give them more appropriate education. Thus, Binet's concern with intelligence testing was highly practical, and relatively atheoretical. Binet saw intelligence as an average of many unlike abilities rather than a single entity, or even a concept. However, the composite score of an individual on a Binet-style intelligence test was computed as the intelligence quotient, a concept that came to dominate thinking about differences in human abilities and their performances within schools for most of the 20th century. A psychologist at Stanford University named Terman (1975, original publication, 1919) revised Binet's original tests, and from this revision emerged the classic Stanford-Binet test. From their work Spearman and Terman (1927) developed and promoted the belief that intelligence was best conceptualised as comprising a single, general capacity for conceptualisation and problem solving and sought to demonstrate that a group of scores on tests reflected this single general intelligence factor. In contrast, Thurstone (1960) and Guilford (1967) argued for the existence of a number of separately identifiable factors or distinctive components of intelligence. Cattell (1971) argued for a hierarchy of factors, in which general, verbal and numerical intelligence had primacy of importance over more specific components.

Jensen (1998), a leading proponent of Spearman's idea of general intelligence, considered the 'g' factor that could be extracted in a hierarchical factor analysis from a large battery of diverse tests of various cognitive abilities, this being seen as the most important psychometric construct in the study of individual differences in human cognitive abilities. Sternberg (1985) followed the middle ground between the extremes of the 'g' theorists who had collected large amounts of data to test the theory of general intelligence but often using restricted ranges of participants, materials or situational

contexts, and those whose theories had been subjected to few or no empirical tests. His theory explained the existence of 'g' in terms of information processing components and metacomponents rather than in terms of any unitary process or property of the brain.

2.2.4 Child Development Studies

Whilst the intelligence theorists and the developmentalists shared a view of the intellectual functions being ultimately linked to brain mechanisms, the developmentalists additionally held the view that cognitive functions develop through distinctive and identifiable stages reached as the human matured. White (2004) described the stages in the mental world as similar to those found in the physical world, the biological stages of living things, from seed through to mature specimen.

Piaget (1926) was one of the most important of the developmental theorists who laid the foundation of the large body of work that followed, with others building on his work and reacting against it. He came to believe that intelligence was constructed by each individual through the two complementary processes of assimilation and accommodation. He theorised that as children interact with their physical and social environments, they organise information into groups of interrelated ideas called schemes. When children encounter something new, they either assimilate it into an existing scheme or create an entirely new scheme to deal with it (Wadsworth, 1996). Piaget believed that intellectual development occurs in four distinct stages: (a) the sensorimotor stage from birth to around age two is a time when intelligence develops through the child's motor interactions with his or her environment, (b) the preoperational stage until the child is six or seven, is where 'true thought' emerges and

the children make mental representations of unseen objects although they are still unable to use deductive reasoning, (c) the concrete operations stage, until the child reaches eleven or twelve is when the child becomes able to use deductive reasoning, demonstrates conservation of number and differentiates his perspective from that of other people and finally (d) the formal operations stage where the most salient feature is the ability to think abstractly.

Central to Piaget's epistemological view was the idea that increasingly complex intellectual processes are built on and emerge from the primitive foundations laid in earlier stages of development.

“Intelligence does not appear derived from mental development, like a higher mechanism, radically distinct from those that have preceded it. Intelligence presents, on the contrary, a remarkable continuity with the acquired or even inborn processes on which it depends and at the same time makes use of.”

(Piaget, 1963)

While Piaget acknowledged that social factors had a role in the construction of knowledge, he did not explore the nature or implications of different kinds of social interactions. In contrast, types of social interactions and their influence on the development of children's learning formed a central part of the theories of learning developed by Feuerstein (1991).

Feuerstein built on the work of Piaget but went much further developing his own explanatory system which suggested structural cognitive modifiability for the improvement of learning. The essence of his theory is that intelligence is not fixed, it is

modifiable. Feuerstein's notion of a learner is anchored to the phenomenon of mediated learning experience as distinct from the experience of direct learning. According to Feuerstein children are exposed to two types of learning situations. The situation of direct learning includes an unmediated interaction between learning material and children's minds. If children are ready to accept the material they will learn and benefit, if they do not know how to accept the material then the second type of learning, the mediated learning experience comes crucially into play.

The mediated learning experience (MLE) describes a special quality of interaction between a learner and a knowledgeable person and identifies two basic forms of interaction: direct learning and mediated learning. Direct learning includes unmediated exposure of the learner to environmental stimuli, including objects, events, texts, pictures and so on. In mediated learning the human mediator intervenes in the learning process by placing himself between the learner and the stimulus and between the learner and the response. The mediator selects, changes, amplifies and interprets both the stimuli that come to the learner and the learner's responses. The absence of the necessary type and amount of MLE, particularly in early years, leads to the underdevelopment of the child's cognitive functions and direct learning strategies. On the other hand, massive infusion of mediated learning at later stages may improve the situation of cognitive deficiency and turn the child into an independent and self-regulating learner.

Another more recent theorist, Gardner, based his work on ideas originally proposed by Piaget, and developed the idea of 'multiple intelligences' (MI). White (2004) described Gardner as a developmentalist who was profoundly influenced by Piaget and worked to extend his approach from areas such as logic and mathematics to the arts. Gardner

(1983) argued that individuals have several neurobiological domains of potential intellectual competence that can develop if the appropriate stimulating factors were available. Gardner hypothesised seven core forms of intelligence (a) linguistic intelligence; (b) musical intelligence; (c) logical-mathematical intelligence; (d) spatial intelligence; (e) bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence; (f) the personal intelligences (interpersonal and intrapersonal); and (g) naturalist intelligence, were advanced in his theory as the seven intellectual regions in which most human beings have the potential for specific advancement. He claimed that his theory aspired to nothing less than:

“a new definition of human nature, cognitively speaking. Whereas Socrates saw man as the rational animal and Freud stressed the irrationality of human beings, I (with due tentativeness) have described human beings as those organisms who possess a basic set of seven, eight, or a dozen intelligences.”

(1999a, p.44).

The number of hypothesised intelligences proposed by Gardner proliferated over time, and others saw gaps or additional knowledge domains which could be covered by yet another hypothesised ‘intelligence’.

For example the journalist Goleman (1998) recognised that a growing number of psychologists agreed with Gardner that old concepts of IQ revolving primarily around linguistic and mathematical skills were outdated and he subsumed Gardner’s ‘personal intelligences’ in his basic definition of ‘emotional intelligence’. Goleman’s (1998) book on this topic contended that emotional intelligence is now as crucial to a child’s future as abilities derived from standard academic fare.

White (2004) argued that while Gardner's 'intelligences' might exist they do not have the power to unfold into more complex forms, and suggested that while they may change over time, this is likely to be due to cultural influences. Furthermore, he challenged the status of Gardner's intelligences claiming that these were rather insecure hypotheses based on Gardner's own personal and cultural value judgements rather than empirical constructs determined through and supported by systematic investigation. White also questioned Gardner's almost arbitrary selection and the proliferation of the particular intelligences he identified.

Nevertheless, noting that "MI theory is all the rage in school reform across the world" White recognised the benefit of these theoretical speculations which is that teachers, particularly those inclined to value a progressive form of education, can become enthused by using MI as a basis for a more flexible type of teaching and learning, which acknowledges that children may have different preferred 'learning styles'. Not everyone learns best through traditional methods that draw heavily on linguistic and logical skills and in accordance with the theory, room is made for children who can bring to bear on their learning their abilities and skills which are not heavily linguistically based.

"And MI does appear to deliver the goods in terms of inclusion and raising self-esteem. Pupils who used to think themselves dim can blossom when they find out how bright they are making music or interacting with people. Kinaesthetic learners can now see themselves as 'body smart'. The idea that intelligence is not necessarily tied to IQ has been a liberating force."

White (2004)

2.2.5 The Human Potential Movement

In contrast to considering the maturational development through the childhood years only, some psychologists addressed the issue of ensuring personal growth across the years in what is termed the 'human potential movement'. Personal growth is a concept central to this field and is concerned with understanding inner states of being as well as modifying outer forms of behaviour. In terms of fulfilling potential, a significant factor is the mental strength or will of the individual.

William James (1902) considered the goal of self-improvement as very important. He considered that every person has an innate ability to modify or adapt his or her behaviour thereby evolving to new levels of personal attainment. He believed that the will is essential to personal growth, describing it as a pivotal point from which meaningful action can occur. Consequently, he concluded that everyone should learn to develop will power.

Adler (Drury, 1989), an individualist, considered that the task of all health-motivated individuals was to develop their own capabilities and potential. Adler wrote that the striving for perfection is innate in the sense that it is part of life. Maslow (1968) believed that the gratification of needs was the most important single principle underlying all human development and motivation. He identified two sets of needs: (a) base and (b) growth. Self-actualisation, a growth need, is the desire for self-fulfilment. These internal strivings allow a person to reach his or her potential and be what he is capable of becoming. Maslow suggested that the need for self-actualisation is universal among the human species but each individual's collection of capacities is unique.

Dweck (2006), a recent proponent of the concept of personal growth describes the achievement of children's potential using the concept of mindset. Her research identified two mindsets, one called 'fixed mindset' based on ability and aptitude, success and failure and one fluid which she called 'growth mindset' based on the belief in change.

Children with a fixed mindset are considered to create an internal monologue in their heads focussed on judging. This is described as: "This means I am a loser.", "This means I am a better person than they are." On probing how they deal with information Dweck found that children put a very strong evaluation on each and every piece of information, something good leads to a very strong positive label and something bad to a strong negative label. In contrast children with a growth mindset also constantly monitor what is going on but their internal monologue is not about judging themselves and others in the same way. They were seen to be sensitive to positive and negative information but they were attuned to its implication for learning and constructive action. This is described as: "What can I learn from this?" "What can I improve?"

Those with fixed mindsets are seen to view effort necessary for plodders but not the endowed while those with the growth mindset believe that even geniuses have to work hard for their achievements. Dweck reported that regardless of the children's ability, effort is the key to the ignition of that ability which turns into accomplishment and that achieving potential is seeing children finding their way to using their abilities. Dweck concluded that everyone is capable of great things with the right mindset and the right teaching.

2.2.6 Social and Cultural Theories of Development

Inspired by the work of the Soviet psychologist Vygotsky (1978) some researchers have investigated the influences of social contexts and cultural practices as key elements in the extent to which intellectual development takes place, rather than physical or neurological differences or hypothesised intellectual differences among individuals.

Vygotsky saw the nature of the stimulus differently from Piaget. For Piaget, the stimulus is not a stimulus until acted upon by the subject, in contrast to Vygotsky's views that the stimulus depends on the action of the environment. Another difference noted by Sinclair (cited by DeVries, 2000), was while Vygotsky focused on the content of the stimulus, Piaget focused on the internal structure of knowing the individual's intellectual functions. Vygotsky (1978) noted his disagreement with Piaget on this point:

“In contrast to Piaget, we hypothesize that development does not proceed toward socialization, but toward the conversion of social relations into mental functions”.

(Vygotsky, 1978)

Fosnot (1996) summarized the essence of this difference by likening it to a visual figure-ground illusion involving the individual and the social and commented:

“If we ask a question about the effect of culture on cognition, we get a cultural answer; if we ask about the individual's cognising, we get an answer that reflects that component”

(Fosnot 1996).

Vygotsky (1978) identified two areas of child development: (a) the area of current development which includes all that the child can do and perform independently and (b) the area surrounding the current development that represents the child's level of development in the near future, the 'zone of proximal development'. According to Vygotsky, key learning processes take place in this zone.

“The zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.”

(Vygotsky, 1978)

As a child advances in learning, the zone of proximal development becomes the area of current development surrounded by another area of future development.

Another important element with respect to the zone of proximal development was the view of the importance of the social nature of the learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. Children, in his view, do not, and cannot develop in isolation. This suggests an interdependence of the child and the social situation, placing a great responsibility on the teacher and the parent to establish an interactive instructional situation between the teacher and learner or the learner and more capable peers. A key assumption made by Vygotsky was that during the course of development everything occurs twice. A child first makes contact with the social environment on an

interpersonal level then a child makes contact within himself. The implication is that the child is first a social creature and then an individual.

2.3 The Factors affecting the Achievement of Potential

This section of the literature review relates to the second objective of the study: to consider the factors that affect the achievement of learning potential. The factors covered in the review are (a) the educational context and (b) the social contexts.

2.3.1 The Educational Context

A determinant of the appropriate educational context depends on the purpose of education and the nature of the system of education. The Scottish government's response to the discussions of a National Debate is *Educating for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2003), where key aims for the improvement of a range of aspects of education were set out, including the increase of pupil access to choice in the curriculum, improved interaction of teachers across the primary and secondary years, and increasing the involvement of parents and the community in the decision making of the school. This section considers the literature concerned with various purposes and systems for education.

2.3.1.1 Education for Responsibility and Use

"Upon the education of the people of this country, the future of this country depends" (Disraeli, 1867). Politicians have been interested in education for a considerable time, and the idea that the potential of a successful nation depends on effective education is not new. The Greeks saw education as geared to the development of the physical and

rational powers of the people so that they might control their natural and social environments more effectively. In 'Form in Republic' Plato (Smith, 1997) was concerned with the questions 'what is a just state?' and 'who is a just individual?' and considered that a particular person's potential is determined by an educational process that begins at birth and proceeds until that person reaches the maximum level of education compatible with interest and ability. Plato described the philosopher-kings' education as beginning with the general primary education until the age of eighteen then two years of intense physical training. Those performing exceedingly well receive a further ten years of rigorous mathematical education. If successful at this stage, the student moves on to five years of training in dialectic. There is a final fifteen-year period of apprenticeship in managing the polis. Those who complete the entire educational process become what he termed 'philosopher-kings'. They are the ones whose minds are so developed that they are able to grasp ideas and therefore, to make wise decisions. Plato's ideal educational system was thus primarily structured so as to produce philosopher-kings. Those educated to this highest level became the leaders of the race.

2.3.1.2 Education of the Individual for Freedom

The book *Émile*, written by the French philosopher Rousseau in the 18th century (Doyle & Smith, 1997), was a significant stimulus to thinking in education. His philosophy of education was essentially developmental in nature. Rousseau argued that the momentum for learning is provided by the growth of the person and that what the educator (he termed a tutor) needs to do is to facilitate opportunities for learning for him to achieve his potential.

“We are born weak, we need strength; helpless we need aid; foolish we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man’s estate is the gift of education.”

(Rousseau, 1762)

A key element seen in his writing was the view that individuals develop through various stages and that different forms of education may be appropriate to each stage. The growth of a child is divided into three sections: (a) the first section to the age of about 12, when calculating and complex thinking are not possible, and children, according to his deepest conviction, live like animals, (b) the second, from 12 to about 15, when reason starts to develop, and finally (c) from the age of 15 onwards, when the child develops into an adult. The book is based on Rousseau's ideals of healthy living where the boy must work out how to follow his social instincts and be protected from the vices of urban individualism and self-consciousness. Rousseau believed it was possible to preserve the original nature of the child by careful control of his education and environment based on an analysis of the different physical and psychological stages through which he passed from birth to maturity.

2.3.1.3 Education for Responsibility and Use and for Freedom

Pestalozzi (Smith, 2005) took Rousseau’s ideas further and explored how these might be developed and implemented. His experiments led him to develop a method where children should learn through activity. Children, he argued, should be free to pursue their own interests and draw their own conclusions. Going beyond Rousseau, he tried to reconcile the tension between the education of the individual (for freedom) and that of the citizen (for responsibility and use). He placed a special emphasis on spontaneity and self-initiated activity and considered that children should not be given ready-made

answers but arrive at the answers themselves. He said that the aim to educate the whole child is beyond intellectual education: a balance of hands, heart and head is also required. Pestalozzi made a significant contribution to the acknowledgement of the school as a child-centred educational force in contrast to Rousseau's emphasis on the role of the tutor.

Froebel's (Smith, 1997) philosophy added elements of the spiritual dimension. He believed that humans were essentially productive and creative and that fulfilment comes through developing these skills in harmony with God and the world. As a result, Froebel sought to encourage the creation of educational environments that involved practical work and the direct use of materials. More recently, Marie Montessori (Kramer, 1988) stressed the development of initiative and self-reliance by permitting children to do by themselves the things that interest them but within strictly disciplined limits. When a child is ready to learn new and more difficult tasks, the teacher should guide the child's first endeavours in order to avoid wasted effort and the learning of wrong habits.

2.3.1.4 Education and Social Consciousness

Dewey (1897) introduced a more considered social learning element to the educational context. He believed that all education is preceded by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of their family and community. This process begins unconsciously almost at birth and is continually shaping their powers, saturating their consciousness, forming their habits, training their ideas, and arousing their feelings and emotions. Through this 'unconscious' education each individual gradually comes to

share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in developing over the ages.

Dewey believed that true education comes through the stimulation of a child's power by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself and that the educational process has two sides, one psychological and one sociological. The child's own instincts and powers give the starting point for all education. He believed that the psychological and social sides are organically related and that education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two or a superimposition of one upon the other. Education, according to Dewey, is a fostering, nurturing and cultivating process implying attention to the conditions of growth. Children go to school to learn but he was not sure that learning occurs most adequately when it is made a separate conscious business. The school, he thought, has the function of coordinating within the disposition of each individual the diverse influences of the various social environments into which they enter: the family, the street, the workshop or store, religious association; and that as a person passes from one environment to another, he could be split into a being having different standards of judgement and emotion for different occasions. Dewey felt that education should not merely be a preparation for future life but should constitute a full life in itself.

Barbour (1996), describing culture as the system of norms, beliefs and practices upheld within social groups, institutions and communities, said it should always be at the heart of the educational process. Culture should be seen as a powerful force which can be harnessed to motivate, excite and encourage the development of young people to be equipped to understand, judge and shape rather than being passive receptors of whatever

happens to come their way. Bruner (1996) concurred with this view, arguing that education should be seen as a major embodiment of a culture's way of life not just a preparation for it. Hofstede (1991) argued that culture may be seen as the collective programming of the mind and that it is culture as it embodies a community's values, approaches, structures and environment that ultimately defines the priorities of an education system. While mechanisms for delivering education are arguably becoming increasingly similar, as a result of the impact of increasing global educational discourses, education's goals remain rooted in specific cultural traditions, the instilling of an existing body of knowledge, the building of social cohesion and the development of individual capacity and agency. Dale (2000), however, argued there is only a loose relationship between organisational forms and the practical needs and goals relevant to local situations. Such a perspective (Hatcher and Lebond, 2001) requires full account to be taken of the role of both structure and agency in education and it needs to recognise the different ways in which knowledge, skill and meaning are created and transformed through social practice.

The educational context is a key factor for the achievement of potential. All children and young people have compulsory schooling for eleven years with an aim that for many learning becomes lifelong. Those parties with responsibility for schooling are in the business to consider carefully the purposes of education and the nature of the school system to enable young people to achieve their potential.

2.3.2 Social and Cultural Contexts

Over the 20th century there has been a growing body of studies in which the social factors impinging on individuals and the norms of the specific cultures in which they are embedded have been recognised as key elements in the shaping of individuals, their learning patterns and their capacity to achieve their potential. Community and culture are increasingly recognised as being influences on education that cannot be ignored. This section explores these two features.

2.3.2.1 Community Factors

Children live in a variety of communities, each of which may expect them to engage differently to achieve potential so while some researchers focused on community as an area of common life others focused on community as a geographical area, and others focused on community as a group of people living in a particular place. Dewey (1916) talked of the association between the concepts of the common, community and communication, where people live in a community by virtue of the factors they have in common, placing communication at its heart. Rogoff (2003) described communities as groups of people who have some common and continuing organization, values, understanding, history and practices. A community, she said, involves people trying to accomplish some things together with some stability of involvement and attention to the ways they relate to each other. Etzioni (1997) called communities social webs of people who know each other and which have a moral voice. Cohen (1985) argued that a community consists of a group who have something in common with each other which distinguishes them from the members of other groups. Community thus implies both similarity and difference and Cohen argued that some boundaries can be marked on a

map, some identified as religious or linguistic, and others exist only in the minds of the people concerned. Lee and Newby (1983) pointed out that people living close to one another do not necessarily have much to do with each other, and that the nature of their relationships with their own particular social networks is one of the most significant aspects of community.

Field (2003) observed that people imagine life in terms of a common good and their preference appears to be increasingly for forming communities based on achieved characteristics rather than for those based on ascribed characteristics. People are ever less likely to think in terms of the communities into which they are thrown by accident or habit, and ever more likely to think in terms of the communities to which they actively chose to belong. Delanty (2003) and Morse (1998) further explored the theme of belonging. Morse suggested that communities now seemed to be settling on two nexuses, the community of interests and the community of relationships. Delanty's idea of a contemporary community was a communication community based on new kinds of belonging possibly in unstable, fluid, open and highly individualised groups. He proposed a classification with four broad positions about community in the 21st Century, (a) an approach that associates community with disadvantage and a need for intervention by society, (b) a sociological perspective where community is seen as a sense of belonging, (c) a politically active interpretation focussed on raising political consciousness and encouraging collective action and (d) the global perspective with it's formation of virtual communities. Morse proposed that successful communities had five key elements: (a) mechanisms for decision taking, (b) the organisation of community work, (c) an accessible community life, (d) the creation of broad avenues for civic leadership and (e) a framework for action for the next generation. As potential is

influenced by the communities to which people belong it is important to consider their cultural practices and traditions.

2.3.2.2 Cultural Practices and Traditions

Traditionally, cultural practices and traditions, in anthropology, were described as the way of life of a human society, transmitted from one generation to the next by learning and by experience and they included social organisation, religion, structure, economic organisation, and material culture. Cultural anthropology developed in the USA under the influence of Tylor and Boras (1909) in the early 20th Century. Tylor wrote:

"Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

(Tylor 1924 [orig. 1871]:1).

It became a very broad subject but was often broken down into specialist areas: linguistics, culture and personality studies, primitive art etc. In contrast anthropologists in Britain concentrated on social systems and drew upon the work of Durkheim and Weber (Geertz, 1973) to establish an independent discipline of social anthropology.

Goodenough (in Geertz, 1973) described cultural practices and traditions as being located in the minds and hearts of men. He defined culture as composed of psychological structures that guide individuals or groups of individuals' behaviour. It consists of whatever it is people have to know or believe, in order to operate in a manner acceptable to other members of that culture. Kluckhohn (1949) defined culture as the total way of life of a people, a way of thinking, feeling, behaving and believing which becomes a social legacy. He saw culture as a storehouse of pooled learning, which sets

out standardized solutions to recurrent problems and regulates behaviour. This pooled learning provides a set of techniques for adjusting to the external environment. Geertz (1973) espoused a concept of culture as essentially semiotic. He saw man as an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, and that culture is comprised of those webs. He considered that the analysis of culture is not an experimental science and to analyse cultural paradigms researchers require a set of logical categories for studying assumptions. Schein (1984) drew up a list of categories: (a) a relationship between humanity and nature, (b) linguistic and behavioural rules and (c) human nature good, evil or neutral. Verhelst (1990) saw culture as a living entity, consisting of elements inherited from the past, outside influences, and new elements invented locally. Culture, he argued, has an important role to play in understanding society. Rogoff (2003) proposed that the cultural practices and traditions developed transcend the individuals involved as one generation replaces another. Even after leaving their community people consider that involvement and those relationships central to their lives.

2.3.2.3 Cultural Influences on Learning

Rogoff (2003) began work as a psychologist, but increasingly her work on the factors which influence learning took her into studies which were anthropological in nature. From her studies of children's upbringing and education in different cultures she developed ideas of human development as a cultural process. Different communities expect children to engage in activities at vastly different times in childhood and might regard timetables of development in other communities as surprising or even dangerous. She gave an example of the outcome of Piaget's work, which was researched in Switzerland and how it produced different responses when trialled in other cultures.

She found support in Vygotsky's concept of interaction in the zone of proximal development where children learn to use the intellectual tools of their community including literacy, number systems, tools for remembering and planning. In Rogoff's view, a person's achievement of his potential depends upon the circumstances that are typical for his community and on the cultural practices with which he is familiar and in which he is immersed. Consequently, Rogoff considered that to understand human development it is essential to understand the development of the cultural institutions and practices in which people participate. Hodkinson and Bloomer (2000) similarly argued that students' learning careers are shaped by social and cultural experience, outside formal education, relating to family, peer groups, home and employment. They saw that opportunities for learning would be culture bound and that efforts to understand learning have to take many different routes. These routes include studies of individual learning orientations, cognitive functioning, and the social context of learning and broader social factors. The concept of a 'learning career' brings these dimensions together as the product of the interaction between an individual's unique set of predispositions and their particular life history. Each new experience is then filtered and in turn shapes their subsequent decisions and actions.

Humes (2004) observed that it has become common to describe schools in Scotland as aspiring to be 'learning communities' and that as such the learning communities are seen as vital agencies in the promotion of a learning society, a requirement considered necessary for a nation to meet the social and economic challenges of the 21st Century. However, it had to be recognised that the schools are often not effective as learning communities. He perceived that there needs to be a better relationship between in-school and out-of-school factors in accounting for educational success and failure. This

is likely to require a clearer characterisation of the different communities that populations, including children inhabited. As potential is influenced by the culture and the community that people belong it is important to consider how cultural capital might advance its achievement.

2.3.2.4 Using Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital has received widespread attention all round the world from both theorists and researchers and is mostly employed in relation to educational systems. Bourdieu (in Stevenson, 2003) in distinguishing between three types of capital identified that parents provide their children with cultural capital, the attitudes and knowledge that makes the educational system a comfortable familiar place in which they can succeed easily.

Bourdieu's concern (Stevenson, 2003) in relation to cultural capital was with its continual transmission and accumulation in ways that perpetuated social inequalities. He believed that only the school system could rise to the challenge of offsetting the effects of different class backgrounds so as to distribute more widely the cultural capital needed for effective understanding of and participation in those cultural activities ranked most highly in conventional hierarchies of the arts and culture. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) tried to address a challenge faced by those who had studied cultural variations in approaches to learning and considered how to characterise individuals' approaches according to their cultural background. Gutiérrez and Rogoff argued against an approach which was commonly used (e.g. Banks, 1995), that of assuming 'regularities' were static, and that general traits of individuals were attributable categorically to ethnic group membership. Gutiérrez and Rogoff suggested focusing attention on variations in

individuals' and groups' histories of engagement in cultural practices. Reay (2004) argued that cultural capital should be diversified away from a narrow understanding based on the appreciation of high art alone. She argued that if cultural capital were understood as a set of more wide ranging reflective and emotional competences then its significance would be enhanced in an educational field. As schooling interfaced increasingly with home and family, Reay suggested that it could be anticipated that cultural capital could become a more overt axis of educational stratification.

2.4 Conditions associated with the Achievement of Potential

2.4.1 Introduction

This section relates to the third objective of the study: to consider the conditions necessary for the achievement of learning potential. The conditions reviewed in the literature were those associated with (a) the individual child (b) the schooling system: the curriculum and pedagogy, the teacher and the peer group (c) the family, and finally (d) the cultural–historical context.

2.4.2 The Individual – the Children

2.4.2.1 A Journey

The message which emerged from thinkers such as Jean Shinoda Bolen and Jean Houston (Wilber, 1997) and also earlier pioneers such as Carl Jung (1964) was that all should endeavour to learn ways of tapping the potential which is latent in the being of each individual. This task is grounded in the everyday experience, a personal quest, and one's own individual journey through life. This might lead to various paths and the

company of many until one glimpses what is real for oneself. The Dalai Lama (Cutler, 1998) expressed a similar view, believing that each individual should embark upon a path, one best suited to his mental disposition, natural inclination, temperament, belief, family and cultural background. Blaise Pascal (Houston, 1989) suggested that there were three ways to rise above the times or stand outside one's own culture – through travel, history or direct knowledge of God. According to Pascal, there were three routes to this achievement, — reason, habit, and revelation. Aldous Huxley (1994) wrote that if one is not oneself a sage or saint, the best thing one could do was to study the works of those who are. The condition identified in this sub-set of literature therefore, is that potential is realised through the conscious striving of individuals on their passage through life, to reach ever higher levels of understanding and enlightenment concerning oneself and the nature of reality.

2.4.2.2 The Intellectual, the Non-intellectual and the Environmental

Kanevsky (1995) explored potential in gifted children and suggested that there are three sets of determining conditions to its achievement — intellectual, non-intellectual and environmental. The intellectual factors are made up of three aspects — a general knowledge base, information-processing efficiency and metacognitive knowledge and control. He put forward the view that if a goal of education is to provide learning experiences that promoted intellectual development, educators need to balance opportunities to acquire knowledge with those that develop efficient information processing and metacognitive skills (the awareness, knowledge and regulation of one's thinking). The non-intellectual conditions which he put forward (the bad mood, the self-doubt, the lack of interest/effort) left him in little doubt that non-intellectual traits and characteristics significantly influence learning. The environmental conditions he

suggested (social: teachers, peers, parents; contextual: materials, time of day, the instruction, grouping strategies, seating arrangement) interact with the intellectual and non-intellectual factors either to amplify or inhibit learning potential. Kanevsky concluded that educators with an understanding of these sources of individual differences in learning potential are better prepared to create the appropriately diverse learning environments which the range of characteristics of individual children demanded.

2.4.2.3 Motivation

The concept of motivation figured largely in the education literature covering many elements similar to those described in section 2.4.2.1, a journey, but was couched in less philosophical and spiritual language. It describes a kind of personal striving in the language and constructs of the psychologists of the 20th century.

Several writers, when speaking of an individual's personal growth talked of will power, motivation, striving for perfection, self-development and self-actualisation. Pavlov & Anrep (1927) suggested that learning has to do with people's emotions, likes, dislikes, fears, and hates, over which they have little conscious control. People need to be motivated to reach their potential and they should be encouraged to continue to learn more in order to have a sense of fulfilment.

Herzberg (1968), a key writer on motivation found that what leads to satisfaction is not the opposite of what leads to dissatisfaction. Good experiences are brought about by achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. Lack of motivation, however is not associated with dissatisfaction. It is more attributed to

interpersonal relationships with colleagues and superiors, policy, working conditions and personal circumstances. Maslow (1970) argued that people are motivated by needs, which he construed as being in a hierarchy of priority. The needs were for physical survival, safety and security, social comfort, for self esteem, and finally for self-actualisation which can be construed as similar to the journey's end conceived by the spiritual writers. Maslow maintained that a need is only motivating, if unsatisfied and that it can only be satisfied if all the ones below it in his hierarchy are also been met.

Farmer's conception of meta-motivation is similar to Maslow's 'being' needs, the need for a sense of understanding, purpose, justice, beauty, aliveness, uniqueness and meaningfulness in life. Meta-motivation can lead to transcending one's own ego to experience a oneness with nature, humanity and life a way to freedom and knowledge (Farmer, 1990), achieving one's fullest potential.

2.4.2.4 The Critical Event or Individual

Often in the literature, it was found that the search for meaning or focus or advancement commenced because of a life-changing incident such as an illness, an accident, a meeting, a family break up, etc. In other accounts, the critical factor identified was an individual, a teacher, a guru or a soul mate as the motivating tool for a person to achieve their full potential.

For example, Bucke and a friend (May, 1993) decided to cross the Sierra Nevadas to try to reach the Pacific Ocean. They became trapped in snow and suffered total starvation and severe frostbite; Bucke lost a foot and part of another. When he recovered Bucke

said 'I am born again'. Crippled in body but nevertheless feeling whole in soul, he considered he had reached towards his full potential as a human being.

William James's first and deepest influence (James, 1902) was his father Henry, whose convictions and work influenced his son's thinking and work direction. It was, however, the discovery of the work of the philosopher Renouvier who championed the freedom of the will that gave direction to James's future work, his full potential.

John B. Watson's father left his mother when he was a child of thirteen and rejected him (May, 1993). Watson felt that he had been betrayed and was devastated by this rejection. At fifteen, his life took a radically different turn when despite a poor school record he enrolled at university and met teachers who changed the course of his life. For these writers, idiosyncratic events or encounters with people or ideas at specific points in their life appeared to have provided the conditions for a spurt in their development both intellectually and as wholly fulfilled individuals.

2.4.3 The School System

Educating for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2003) sets out key aims for the improvement of a range of aspects of education. In 2004, a Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004) was introduced as a framework providing explicit statements of the aims of education in Scotland, concepts which have long been implicit. In summary, the purposes of education are to enable all young people to become: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; effective contributors. The development of these capacities, attributes and capabilities lies at the heart of work on curriculum renewal.

“Scottish schools have at their heart a vision of enabling all children and young people to thrive and achieve their full potential as learners and as members of society.”

(Scottish Executive, 2005)

2.4.3.1 The Curriculum and Pedagogy

Dearden (1975) argued that a child’s education should not be like choosing from a curriculum menu, it should be like entering into a selected cultural inheritance that has to be understood and cannot be experienced prior to gaining that understanding. Dearden (1975), developing the ideas of Dewey (1916), emphasised the importance of teachers’ awareness of children’s individual differences at different ages and stages. He considered that expectations, practices and methods should be appropriately matched, in order for pupils to understand and recognise the significance of what has been learned. Burden (1993) described factors which included the part played by children in their own learning, their motivation, their personal characteristics, the learning process and the learner’s own concept of success and failure.

Hart et al (2004) compared and contrasted two different kinds of learning, the first is the typical learning that begins in the very earliest days of schooling, as young people begin to hear and understand the judgements that their teachers make about them and everything they do, and where they learn their standing in comparison with their peers, particularly in relation to their supposed ability. The second is an alternative kind of learning called learning without limits, a learning free from the constraints imposed by ability focused practices, free from the indignity of being labelled top, middle or bottom, fast or slow, free from the wounding consciousness of being treated as someone who can aspire at best to only limited achievements.

Hart et al declared that everyone, without exception, has the capacity to learn effectively in school. Everyone's capacity for learning can be increased if the forces that constitute it - internal and external, individual and collective – can themselves be changed in ways experienced by young people as more enabling. These authors argue that setting aside the ability template involves adopting a radically different mindset, a different way of making sense of what happens in classrooms based on a radically different orientation to the future.

Mayes & Freitas, (2004) in their review described four distinctive learning theories derived from psychological studies that appear to inform practice and pedagogy in schools. The first model, offering the most formally structured learning tasks, called associative learning, offers learning initially through basic stimulus-response conditioning, later through the capacity to associate concepts in a chain of reasoning or to associate steps in a chain of activity to build a composite skill. Associative learning theories are not concerned with how concepts or skills are represented internally, but in how they are manifested in external behaviours.

The second model called constructive (individual) describes how people learn by actively exploring the world around them receiving feedback on their actions and drawing conclusions. Constructivity leads to the integration of concepts and skills into the learner's existing conceptual or competency structures, based on the individual's experience, and were used to inform ideas of how misconceptions were formed in pupils minds in subject areas, particularly science. Constructive theories are more concerned with what happens between input from the external world and the manifestation of new behaviours.

The constructive model (social) recognised the extent to which the social interaction of peer learners and teachers play a key role in development by engaging in dialogue with the learner, developing a shared understanding of the task and providing feedback on the learner's activities and representations. Collaborative work typical of social constructive approaches is concerned with enabling learners to reach beyond what they are individually capable of learning.

The fourth model, situative learning recognising the most authentic context for learning, describes how people learn by participating in communities of practice progressing from novice to expert through observation, reflection, mentorship and 'legitimate peripheral participation' in community activities. Situativity emphasises the social context of learning but this context is likely to be close or identical to the situation in which the learner will eventually practice. The authenticity of the learning environment is at least as significant as the support it provides.

2.4.3.2 The Teacher

Tickle (2001) described the difference between 'professional intellectuals' such as teachers who handle stable, transmissible and at times even stagnating or dated knowledge and 'organic intellectuals' who constantly interact with society, struggle to change minds engage in the evolution of knowledge, raise issues in the public domain and defend decent standards of social well-being, freedoms and justice. In Tickle's view, all teachers should aspire to be organic intellectual educators implementing programmes which lead to innovation and optimal educational experience. From his review, Burden (1993) found that the part played by the mediation process between teachers and children as a result of their two-way interaction was important. Teachers

have a strong influence on pupils' learning, giving them confidence to master necessary curricular material. In return, pupils who make sense of how their teachers convey their expectancies interact with their own developing feelings of self-worth and perceived control over achievement outcomes. He concluded that there were three important issues: (a) the autonomy of the teacher in the choice of experiences for the child (b) the need for teacher to enter into the child's cultural inheritance and (c) the need for the teacher to be an interventionist and leader, having to explain, instruct and insist in addition to guide and stimulate in less specific ways. This has close parallels with Feuerstein's model, in which a teacher using his mediated learning experience theory and practice is similarly seen as a mediator. Hart et al (2004) described a model of co-agency between teachers and pupils to enable young people to take shared responsibility and in recent discussions among teachers in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2007) the model of reflective practitioners and the need to help others reflect on their practice were seen to be the mark of a teacher for excellence.

2.4.3.3 The Peer Group

Gay (1995) suggested that the peer group was the halfway house between the family and the adult world, and was one of the most powerful and potent forces effecting attitudes and engagement in the adolescent. Parents interviewed by Gay worried about which class their child would be placed in at the secondary school because of this strength of influence. Early adolescence comprises a time characterised by an increasing dependence on peer relations to establish and maintain positive self-perceptions (Steinberg, 1990). However, Carter, Bennetts & Carter (2003) concluded that peer leadership is essentially an adult concept: adolescents do not acknowledge peer leadership as they reflect on and make sense of the social realities of life reflected within

the group. This group influence, Harris (1995) decided, declines when adolescents became adults.

2.4.4 The Home Environment

A number of authors have responded positively and negatively with regard to the home environment and educational experiences. Harris (1995) described how each child in a family inhabits his unique niche in the ecology of the family and it was within these niches that the formative aspects of development are presumed to occur. Gestwicki (1996) talked about families today – the influences of marital instability, unmarried mothers, poverty, stress, increased rate of social change stress in modern living, etc. She proposed that the role of teacher should be to socialise children to the values held by the family but also to assist and monitor the children's development as learners and prepare them for school. Epstein (1995) argued that when parents become involved in the education of their children, the children try harder and achieve more. By involvement, he meant helping and encouraging children to learn at home, developing positive attitudes towards school and contributing to the personal growth and academic success of their children. However, it is not clear, according to Wikeley (1989), what the optimal level of participation is, or at which point involvement becomes less helpful, and how the impact of involvement may affect parents' feelings about their children. One of the key factors in the support given to the child in engaging with the work of school and its goals, is effective, harmonious and productive relationships between the school and the home.

2.4.4.1 Relationships between Home and School

School staff often express frustration at the difficulties encountered when trying to communicate with parents. However, the idea that schools simply need an effective communication system to engage with parents and thus forge effective relationships is challenged by several studies. Scribner and Cole's (1981) work was influential in arguing that schools need to consider the learning activities they institute not as separate skills but as social practices into which people are encultured or apprenticed as members of specific social groups. Children who enter school already having been partially apprenticed into the social practices of schooling, invariably perform better at the practices of schooling right from the start. Cairney (2000) showed the need to understand and respond to the relationship between home and school driven by the desire to contextualise school education more firmly. If the relationship between the home and school learning is to be optimised, then there needs to be an understanding of the complex relationship between these two social settings. Care is needed to balance acknowledging a community's diversity against seeking to make its families conform to school expectations for learning.

Those parents who value education are most likely to promote it. In contrast parents who have had bad experiences or who do not value education tend to be passive or even actively negative towards it. Schribner and Cole (1981) and Cairney (2000) talked of an aim to optimise home and school relationships through a greater understanding of the social reality. Connell (1995) and Cairney and Ruge (1998) recognised differences in parents based on class, race and culture and how this is reflected in relations with the curriculum as well as teachers and the school system. Cairney in his work, backed by research in the US and Australia suggested that schools and parents have to be on the

same side, put the child's education foremost and develop a positive partnership to advance the child's potential. Rich (2002) argued that a child's education is the shared responsibility of the school and the home. Outside the school, she pointed to the home as the most salient source of learning, encouragement and support for a child.

When Wikeley (1989) explored communications between parents and teachers and their perceptions of each other, he found that teachers have difficulty talking to parents. He found that parents and teachers often have very similar views although they are not aware of how close their views are. In fact, he suggested, teachers have a tendency to be less aware of how parents view education than the parents of the teachers' views. He raised questions as to how these misunderstandings arose and how far the teachers' misreading of the parents' opinions affected the formation of a partnership. Chrispeels' study (1987) highlighted communication as a barrier. He considered that without good communication between home and school, it is unlikely that other facets of parental involvement would be successful. His view was that teachers recognise the importance of communicating with families yet they often feel frustrated by their efforts because of factors such as a lack of communication skills, tension between teachers and parents, and differences in perspectives. If parents and teachers share responsibility for creating a working relationship, he considered then there should be a way to prevent or resolve parent-teacher differences. An additional point for consideration of parents and teachers is that they know the child in different contexts and that each may well be unaware of what the child is like in the other context and that different people might have different perspectives on the same issue. Rich (2002) found that parental influences were often overlooked in discussions of a child's schooling while Schwartz (2002) argued that

parents are no less than partners in their children's education and that all parents have a place in their children's school.

2.5 The Current Educational Policy Context

This section looks towards the fourth objective of this study which is to consider the indicators developed in the study to reflect on policy and practice in Scottish education and looks at some recent relevant developments in the Scottish educational system.

Post War developments, which revolutionised the ways of working in Scotland's primary schools, were the Primary Memorandum (Scottish Education Board, 1965) and the 5–14 National Curriculum Guidelines (Scottish Executive, 1987). The Primary Memorandum, influenced by progressive educational thinkers such as Piaget, Bruner and Dewey, promoted a more 'progressive' or 'child centred' approach to the primary years than the traditional Scottish primary schooling. The 5–14 National Curriculum Guidelines later produced a more structured approach to the curriculum with descriptions of knowledge and skills that children in primary schools might be expected to attain at different ages and stages. The progression described in the development of the child's skills marked a shift from the labelling of children from being e.g. an 'A level child' or a 'C level child' to being 'a child at level A' or a child at level C' etc., with the prospect of unhindered progression through the later stages.

After fifty years of a selective system of schooling in which the Scottish "qualifying" examination was a key feature in determining a child's pathway to secondary education, the 1970s brought the comprehensive system to secondary schools with the aim of bringing a greater equality of opportunity for all. Over the subsequent years 'O' grades

and 'H' grades, which measured competence nationally to specific standards, and were used as filters and hurdles, allowing access to further progression in the system for only a small proportion of pupils, were replaced by Standard Grades and Higher Still. These gave recognition to the competence and attainments of all children at a series of graded levels. These changes moved the schooling towards a more systematic but inclusive process for young people. However, the lock step and age related hurdles of the previous system, and the 'sorting' mindset of the secondary teachers have proved rather more difficult to change than the certification mechanisms.

The 'educational deficit' experienced by children from communities with low socio-economic indicators were of particular concern. Donald Dewar (1998) launched new community schools to raise standards and tackle social exclusion. New community schools were intended to bring together under one roof a team of professionals providing a range of services including education, social work, family support and health education and promotion services.

"New Community Schools are at the leading edge of this Government's radical strategy to promote social inclusion and to raise educational standards. These schools will embody the fundamental principle that the potential of all children can only be fully realised by addressing their needs in the round. This approach will make a step change to the attainment of children particularly those who face serious barriers to learning outside the school."

(Dewar, 1998)

The view was taken that the parental influences, the home environmental influences and the community issues were key to enabling children achieve their learning potential and

required further investigation particularly in the light of the new community school vision.

The aspirations for the development of responsive educational systems which met the needs of most children and young people were brought into a legal framework in the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act etc. 2000 (Scottish Parliament, 2000). It set out the rights and responsibilities of parents and local authorities to secure:

“an education directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.”

(Scottish Parliament, 2000)

In order to progress the Act towards implementation it stated:

“national priorities will set out a coherent and agreed set of strategic objectives and will reflect the values, principles and aspirations of all who are committed to promoting improvement in Scottish education.”

(Scottish Parliament, 2000)

The national priorities were published under the headings: (a) achievement and attainment; (b) a framework for learning; (c) inclusion and equality; (d) values and citizenship and (e) learning for life. All of these were directed towards the enhancement of the experience and outcomes of education for every pupil, and to set them on a road towards being valued members of their community, and towards learning throughout their lives.

In 2002, the Scottish Government launched a national debate on the purpose of education. The government's response to the discussions which were conducted throughout the country was *Educating for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2003), in which key aims for the improvement of a range of aspects of education were set out, including the increase of pupil access to choice in the curriculum, improved interaction of teachers across the primary and secondary years, and increasing the involvement of parents and the community in the decision taking of the school. In 2004, a *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004) was introduced as a framework to improve learning, attainment and achievement of children and young people in Scotland, to ensure they achieved on a broad front, and not just in terms of examinations. The *Additional Support for Learning Act* (Scottish Parliament, 2004) focused on the child who might require additional support for a variety of reasons, and most recently *Focusing on Inclusion* (Scottish Executive, 2006), dealing with both educational and social needs continues the advancement of the national agenda to enable equal opportunities for all Scottish children.

Each of these policies in some way promote the development of a system of education that is responsive to the diverse needs of all young people in Scotland, and which directs and supports them towards the highest possible level of achievement in a wide range of talents — not solely academic.

2.6 A Nested-systems Theory'

Throughout the literature review it was noted that the many theories espoused have a very specific and narrow focus. A different kind of study bringing together all of the dynamic elements needed to be considered.

Bronfenbrenner's 'nested systems theory' (1979) provides a framework which seeks to investigate children's development within the context of the system of relationships that formed their environment. This nested systems theory, also known as the bioecological systems theory, showed five environmental systems ranging from fine-grained inputs of direct interactions with social agents to broad based inputs of culture.

The theory emphasised children's own biology, emotional system and cognitive system (the microsystem) as the primary environment which fueled their development. The interaction between factors in the child's maturing biology, his immediate home environment and school environment (the mesosystem) and the community landscape (the exosystem) fueled and steered his development. Changes in one layer was seen to ripple throughout other layers. To study children's potential it would be necessary to look at the children, their immediate social and educational environment and also the interaction of the wider cultural environment.

Osborn et al.'s (2003) project was the only one which could be considered to come close to this type of extended study. Their study across three countries, England, Denmark and France identified the need for a social theory of learning, linking intra-individual (personal biography), interpersonal (peer and sub-cultural groupings) and socio-historic (national culture) elements. The first element goes to the heart of the learning process,

the second element to a more explicit education system building on core notions of individual identity whilst recognizing the need to construct a rationale for meaningful education in terms of a socio-cultural theory of learning. The third element concerns the role of different pedagogic structures and practices, what these represent and their derivation from the different ideological and institutional traditions which represent and reinforce the culturally specific character of particular institutional and systemic arrangements. A fourth element is conceived at the most macro level, providing an analytic structure for the discourse of marketing, social inequality and globalisation, as framed within the central question of the perceived purpose of education.

The study of Osborn et al was concerned with the extent to which pupils showed:

“ alienation, apathy, disaffection, boredom and apprehension.”

(Osborn et al, 2004, p 4)

They questioned the extent to which schools were ready to serve the rapidly changing world of the 21st century – the expansion of the information base, the increasing complexity of the changing workplace and the greater diversity of the students and social problems. They found significant differences in the ways in which children in the three countries constructed their identity as learners, and situated these differences in identity construction in specific national and local contexts.

Clearly it would not be possible to replicate their extensive qualitative and quantitative data gathering in a PHD study. However, what can be attempted is an exploration of specific aspects of the educational and social contexts set within the wider aspirations of Scottish education and the policies that promote these aspirations.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review showed the concept of potential to be complex and the meaning thick and complex. It showed that potential has been considered across a range of disciplines over many centuries, and that concern with children reaching their potential has come into particular prominence in Scottish educational policy in recent years. Three major ideas were identified: potential as something an individual is born with; potential as something one becomes and potential as something that the individual may strive towards, but never actually realise.

When considering the factors and conditions conducive to the achievement of potential in the educational and social contexts, the purpose of education was identified as key, an education for the nation versus education for the individual alongside the nature of an education system. The changing economic, political and social frameworks of the 21st century identified a need to consider the nature of the communities, their cultural heritage and the use of cultural capital in the consideration of the achievement of potential.

Recent policy documents in Scotland seem to acknowledge the importance of all children, the diversity of their needs as learners and of their talents, and to set out a commitment that all children will have the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.

Finally the view that a different kind of study, one which brings together all of the dynamic elements that make up the conditions necessary to achieve potential needs to be considered.

2.7.1 The Research Purposes

The word ‘potential’ has entered the vocabulary of the teachers and the policy makers, and appears in the published aims of many schools. The aim of this study is to establish what the word means to key agents in the system —parents and teachers — in one area of rural Scotland. The main purposes of this research therefore were to (1) explore the understanding of potential by stakeholders of education in the North East of Scotland, (2) consider the factors perceived to affect potential, (3) consider the conditions perceived necessary for the achievement of potential and (4) consider the implications of the findings for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used for the collection of data and its analysis. Since the overall aim of the study was to understand as fully as possible the meaning which the word ‘potential’ had in the discourse and the actions of those working in schools in Scotland, the research programme was designed as a qualitative study. An iterative approach with similarities to that advocated by Guba and Lincoln (1998) and the principles of grounded theory set out by Glaser and Strauss (1997) were used in the data collection. The data analysis was similar to that advanced by Miles and Huberman (1994), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Edley (2001). Four rounds of fieldwork were undertaken, the details of which are presented in sections 3.7 and 3.8.

Like the ‘nested theory’ approach of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the methodology used in this study allowed consideration of the factors associated with the individual child, the teaching and learning context, the internal school environment and wider home/community features.

3.2 The Research Questions

The specific research questions addressed in the study relevant to the four areas of research concern detailed in section 2.6.1 were as follows:

Research purpose one was concerned with an exploration of the concept of potential.

In what ways did the literature assist in the development of understanding the concept of potential?

What is the meaning of potential from the perspective of the different groups involved in the study?

What is the meaning of potential in the context of the Scottish education system?

Research purposes two and three were concerned with an exploration of the understanding of the key factors influencing potential and the conditions conducive for its achievement.

What are the key factors that participants in the study regard as having an influence on the potential of the children and young people?

What conditions are seen as conducive to the attainment of potential for the children and young people in the study area?

Research purpose four was to reflect on the implications for educational policy and practice.

What are the implications for the planning of policy and practice in Scottish schools?

3.3 A Qualitative Study

The view taken was that the study lent itself to the gathering of qualitative rather than quantitative data, such as might have been obtained by surveys of numerical frequencies of events or surveys of participants. Likewise, the type of the research questions asked

did not readily lend themselves to experimental design such as comparison of methods, or before-after effects. Creswell's definition of the qualitative approach was adopted:

"Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting."

(Creswell, 1998)

Choosing such an approach was a commitment to spending extensive time in the field and engaging in a process of data analysis that was also time consuming. Evidence was required to substantiate claims with a need to show multiple perspectives. This approach of progressive focusing seemed to offer the best prospects of respecting the complexity of the field and of the questions that the writer was asking.

Some of the traditions of grounded theory were particularly appropriate to the enquiry. The stakeholders' portrayal of potential was concentrated upon as this is constructed by experiences in life and there was a need to make sense of and interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people brought to it. Glaser and Strauss (1967) first articulated grounded theory in 1967 and later elaborated on it in subsequent books (Glaser, 1978, Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990)). They held that theories should be 'grounded' in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions and social processes of people. The centrepiece of grounded theory research was the development of a theory closely related to the context of the problem being studied.

3.4 Selection of the Geographical Location of the Study

The location chosen for the study was the North East corner of Scotland, the county of Aberdeenshire. The area has a diversity of communities: coastal towns with a heritage in the fishing industry, a large rural area with a heritage in the farming industry, market towns, (many now commuter areas for the city of Aberdeen), and conurbations with service and manufacturing industries – food processing, papermaking, engineering. The traditional industries of fishing and farming have been in decline and an increasing number of people have become involved in the oil and gas industry. While it might be argued that the study area lacked ethnic diversity and inner city features there are significant numbers of foreign workers in the food processing industries and there are a number of identified pockets of social deprivation throughout the area provided in the indices of social deprivation by the Scottish Executive (2003). (Appendix 2).

3.5 Selection of Informant Groups

Other researchers who conducted fieldwork as part of their investigations into topics related to potential include Sparks (1993), who discussed the historical/cultural meaning of giftedness-as-potential, with potential viewed as a valuable natural resource to be nurtured, and Kanevsky (1994), who suggested that potential had three sets of determining factors – intellectual, non-intellectual and environmental. Their fieldwork was small scale and conducted through interviews and observation. Osborn et al. (2003) in a larger scale survey compared learners in Denmark, France and England, using observation, questionnaires, individual interviews and group interviews with teachers and pupils as the stakeholders.

The aim of this study was to extend and build on their studies, and to set the investigation in the context of an educational setting in which the promotion of pupils' potential was an explicit national policy commitment. In selecting the informants, the initial aim was to make contact with as great a range of stakeholders as possible who were involved in the education process - head teachers, senior managers in schools, teachers, non-teaching educational professionals including educational psychologists, lifelong learning workers and education officers, parents and pupils. It was considered that all such stakeholders, with a range of academic backgrounds from the most advanced academic to those with no formal qualifications, should be consulted at this stage, as they might all consider themselves to have a legitimate view on the achievement of learning potential, the factors that affect it and the conditions necessary for its achievement.

In the third and fourth rounds of data gathering, the focus was centred on the views of the teachers and parents only. One reason for this was that they were emerging as the adults most powerfully placed to influence the contexts in which the potential of a child was conceived and developed. It was regretted that the study did not manage to extend to pupils, but this would have proved to be beyond the scope of the time and resources available.

3.6 Selection of the Approach to the Study

An iterative approach was chosen for the data collection. It allowed the opportunity to explore with a range of people who could be said to have a determining role in education their views, opinions, beliefs and attitudes. It further allowed the pursuit of

emerging themes with subsequent groups of stakeholders chosen at random or purposefully as appropriate.

The data collection was conducted mostly in the local school setting because contexts give life to and are given life by the people in them (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Schools were that natural setting for this study.

The role of the author was to identify the full array of stakeholders who might have an interest in the study then elicit from each their constructions, their range of claims, concerns and issues. The role was also to provide a context and a methodology through which the different claims, concerns and issues could be analysed. The author provided mostly open-ended questions, as it was not possible to pursue someone's construction with a set of predetermined questions based solely on the author's construction. Hofstadter (1979) made the case that the perfection of an instrument was a trade-off with its adaptability – the more perfect the instrument the less adaptable. The author then had to analyse the data and develop the themes for the next round of data collection.

The next stage in the approach was the process. Four continuously interacting elements were involved, cycling and recycling until the author decided the data was saturated. The stakeholders who entered the dialectic process were in a position to broaden and deepen the author's exploration of potential, the factors affecting its achievement, and the conditions necessary for its achievement.

Firstly the stakeholders had to be appropriately selected. Sampling was carried out neither for the sake of drawing a group that was representative of some population to

which the findings could be generalised nor to satisfy statistical requirements of randomness. The sample was selected to serve a purpose. Guba and Lincoln (1989) called this purposive sampling. Patton (1980) described six different types of purposive samples — extreme or deviant cases, typical cases, sampling critical areas, politically important, sensitive areas and maximum variation sampling each of which was devised for a particular purpose of investigation. In this study, different methods of sampling were used as appropriate at different stages in the data collection.

According to Guba and Lincoln the sample should be selected serially so that no sampling element is chosen until after data collection from the preceding element has already been accomplished. The sample was thus selected contingently both in the sense that each succeeding element was chosen to be different from preceding elements and in the sense that the elements were chosen in ways that best served the particular needs of the inquiry at that moment. Initially, respondents were selected who could potentially provide constructions different from those heard before. Later, as certain themes were identified respondents were selected who could be particularly informative and articulate about those particular items.

The second element in the research design was related to the continuous interplay of data collection and analysis that occurred as the inquiry proceeded. Broad ranging questions were used at the beginning so that the respondent could offer up testimony in their own terms. In effect, the author was asking, 'Tell me the questions I ought to be asking and then answer them for me?' The general responses were analysed to become the agenda for the next round.

The third element was to do with grounding the findings that emerged. As successive respondents were questioned the analysis went on apace. The information became increasingly complex. Over time, higher order themes emerged. The themes differed from the individual constructions originally offered by respondents and certainly from the construction entertained by the author at the beginning of the study. These themes were grounded in all those constructions derived via the process.

These emerging constructions had to meet certain criteria. Each had to fit and had to work. A construction is said to work when it provides a level of understanding on a subject that is acceptable and credible to the respondents on a subject and to the author. It has also to be relevant in that it has to deal with the constructs, the core problems and processes that emerged in the interview. It has also to be open to continuous change to accommodate new information that emerges at new levels of sophistication to which it was possible to raise the constructions (Glaser, 1978).

The fourth element was that of the emergent design. As each sample element was selected, each set of data recorded and each element of the joint construction devised, the design became more and more focused. As the author became better acquainted with what was salient, the sample became more directed, the data analysis more structured, and the construction more definitive. Finally, the product of the multiple iterations was a set of implications for consideration. These implications would help the realization not only of the state of affairs that were believed by the constructors to exist but also of some of the underlying motives, feelings and rationales leading to those beliefs.

3.7 The Research Design

This study had four rounds of fieldwork. The details of the data collection samples for each round are presented in Table 3.1. The author took the information gathered in each round, analysed it and used it to inform the methods and procedures of the subsequent round.

Round one of the fieldwork comprised a series of unstructured interviews that took place across the geographical study area. A wide variety of stakeholders were invited to participate. The stakeholders (Table 3.1) were asked their views of the concept of potential, the factors affecting the achievement of potential and the conditions necessary for the achievement of potential. The information produced was used to create a list of themes to be used as a basis for the second round of interviews.

Round two comprised a series of semi-structured interviews that took place across the geographical study area. Again, a wide variety of stakeholders (Table 3.1) were invited to participate. They were interviewed on a one to one basis on some occasions and pairs on other occasions to allow different types of feedback. The pairs were encouraged to discuss and develop the themes from round one, which were used as prompts. The interviews produced information that was used to create questions to be used in the third round of interviews.

Round three consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews conducted in a more systematic and structured way than previously and took place in two of the districts of the study area. The first set of interviews was conducted on a one to one basis with the parent and the author. The second set was sampled in a different way where the

participants (Table 3.1) were interviewed in groups and the author led the group through a series of questions. The interviews produced information that was used to create the vignettes for the fourth and final round.

Table 3.1 The Samples of Respondents in Each Round of the Data Collection

Round 1: Unstructured interviews

School types: Rural, coastal schools, urban and country town schools.

School sizes: Large 250+, medium 72 – 250, small 1-71.

24 interviewees: aged 20 – 60, 17 women, 7 men: 12 primary head teachers (9 class committed), 1 secondary head teacher, 1PT special educational needs, 4 teachers, 1 educational psychologist, 1 education officer, 4 parents.

Round 2: Semi-structured interviews

School types: Rural, coastal schools, urban and country town schools:

School sizes: Large 250+, medium 72 – 250, small 1-71.

43 interviewees: aged 5-60 including men, women, boys and girls: 4 primary head teachers (2 class committed), 3 members of senior management teams in primary schools, 2 senior teachers, 4 primary teachers, 1 nursery teacher, 2 members of senior management teams in secondary schools, 2 secondary teachers, 1PT special educational needs, 1 educational psychologist, 3 community education workers, 1 education officer, 8 parents, 8 primary pupils in the presence of their parents, 3 teenagers as a group.

Round 3: Semi-structured interviews

School types: A coastal town school, a rural school and an inland town school with a significant level of social deprivation.

12 interviewees: parents: a mix of mothers, fathers, single parent, nuclear family with parents working at home and away from home.

Additionally: 4 open meetings in 4 rural schools with rolls of 20-50 pupils. 20 interviews completed: 17 with females and 4 with males

Round 4: Focus groups

Area F: four focus groups (n=26 participants)

Teachers: Group 1: Secondary: 3 men and 3 women
Group 2: Primary: 6 women

Parents: Group 3: 5 women
Group 4: 9 women

Area B: four focus groups (n= 23 participants)

Teachers: Group 1: Secondary: 3 men and 2 women
Group 2: Primary: 6 women

Parents: Group 3: 2 men and 4 women
Group 4: 6 women

Round four, the final round, comprised a series of focus groups in two districts of the study area with distinctive demographic characteristics. The objective was to develop discussion using vignettes to allow stakeholders to consider a vicarious situation to which they could respond. Whilst it was realised that vicarious experience was not equivalent to actual experience, it did provide many of the same opportunities for participants to engage in an exposition of their views and respond to a range of views offered by others. This opportunity was found to be an excellent way to introduce a stakeholder to new information and new levels of sophistication that could with a little effort lead to an exposition and possibly a reconstruction of the stakeholder's original opinions.

3.8 The Procedures for the Fieldwork

This section describes the methodology, the sample, the data gathering procedures and the analysis used for each round of the fieldwork.

3.8.1 Round 1

3.8.1.1 The Methodology

The aim in this first round was to concentrate on the stakeholders' portrayal of the experience of learning and to examine their concept of potential in all its complexity as it had been constructed by their experiences in life. An attempt was made to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people brought from their experiences: views, opinions and concerns on the concept of potential. Thoughts on the factors affecting the achievement of learning potential and the conditions necessary for the achievement of learning potential were collected.

Unstructured interviews were chosen as the method in this round in order to give those interviewed the greatest possible opportunity to express their own ideas. A weakness of this type of open-ended interviewing is that after the initial opening question, subsequent questions may not be asked in the same way across the sample. However, a strength of this style of interview is that important, unanticipated information may be elicited.

3.8.1.2 The Sample

Those chosen to be interviewed were selected to serve the purpose of gathering the widest range of views, opinions and issues regarding the concept of potential, the factors affecting potential and the conditions necessary for the achievement of potential, Guba and Lincoln (1989) called this strategy purposive sampling. Patton (1978) described six different types of purposive samples and of these maximum variation sampling was the most appropriate one to adopt. When selecting teaching staff and parents for interview a diversity of geographical areas was chosen and different types of schools. In total 24 individuals were interviewed (Table 3.1) who had an involvement in the education process in the study area, and who were representative of the demography of the local area. There were representatives from rural and coastal schools, urban and country schools and large (over 250 pupil) medium sized (72-250 pupil) and small (1-71 pupil) schools. These 24 individuals were a useful sample with which to begin an exploration of the area, at the first stage of fieldwork. The iterative approach would allow any gaps in sampling to be identified and rectified as far as possible in the next round of interviews.

3.8.1.3 The Data Gathering Procedures

The series of unstructured interviews was conducted by the author. During 1999, head teachers, teachers and parents were invited to attend for interview in their schools. Head teachers were invited directly by the author using the council’s intranet system and asked to nominate teachers, non-teaching staff, and parents for interview. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviewees were given the context for the research and then were invited to talk about their views. The three key questions are indicated in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Questions for Round One Interviews

| |
|---|
| "What do you think potential is?" |
| "What do you think are the factors that affect children achieving their potential?" |
| "What do you think are the conditions necessary for children to achieve their potential?" |

The author took notes of the issues raised.

3.8.1.4 The Analysis

Procedures for the analysis of interview notes, as advanced by Strauss & Corbin (1990), were used: the developing categories of information (open coding); interconnecting categories (axial coding); building the story that connected the categories (selective coding); and ending with a discursive set of categories. In open coding, the text was examined for salient categories of information supported by the text. Using a constant comparative approach, an attempt was made to saturate the categories, to look for instances that represented the category and to continue looking and interviewing until

the new information obtained did not further provide insight into the category. The categories were subgrouped into properties representing as many perspectives as possible about the categories. Properties were dimensionalised and presented on a continuum. Overall, the process was to reduce the database to a small set of themes that characterised the process as advocated by Strauss & Corbin (1990).

3.8.2 Round 2

3.8.2.1 The Methodology

The methodology adopted in round two was designed to explore further and deeper the views, opinions and issues that emerged from round one of the fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the appropriate data gathering method in round two, using the major themes that emerged from the previous round as the basis for exploring them in greater depth. This guided form of interview is designed to keep interaction focused, covering the same ground with every respondent set, while allowing individual experience to emerge. A weakness is that the more structure there is the less the interviewee can divert from the agenda without losing potentially important elements of their understanding and construction of the ideas discussed.

3.8.2.2 The Sample

The sample of 43 (Table 3.1) was more extensive than that in round one, extending the number and range of secondary school teachers, introducing community education staff, children and young people. There were representatives from rural and coastal schools, urban and country schools and large (over 250 pupil) medium sized (72-250 pupil) and

small (1-71 pupil) schools. Patton’s (1980) maximum variation sampling was again used as the appropriate strategy for this round.

3.8.2.3 The Data Gathering Procedures

The series of semi-structured interviews took place in schools or the education office during 2000 and were conducted by this author. Head teachers, teachers, non-teaching professional staff, parents and pupils were invited for interview from a range of schools: secondary, primary, nursery and special. Some of the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis while others were conducted with pairs of interviewees. This strategy was adopted to encourage a varied range of responses. The paired interviews allowed the interviewees to explore issues and develop views. The interviews were of a semi-structured nature and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviewees were given the context of the study ‘the achievement of potential’. They were asked what they thought potential meant and then they were asked how potential could be achieved using key themes. (Table 3.3)

Table 3.3 Themes for Round Two Interviews

| |
|---|
| The child (his needs, qualities and required skills), |
| The teacher (his needs, desirable qualities and required skills), |
| The school environment, parents/home environment (the characteristics and requirements) |
| The community. |

The primary pupils were asked a series of questions with prompts, as required, concerning their likes and dislikes of school and what helped them to do as well as they possibly could.

In this phase of the data collection, the author requested permission to record the interviews using a tape recorder and all agreed without reservation. The author also took notes of the key issues raised.

3.8.2.4 The Analysis

The analysis followed the same pattern as round one. Procedures for the analysis as advanced by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) were used. In the open coding, the text was scrutinised for salient categories of information. Using a comparative approach there was an attempt to saturate the categories to look for instances that represented the category and to continue looking until the new information obtained did not further provide insight into the category. The categories were sub grouped into properties representing multiple perspectives about the categories. Overall, the process was to reduce the database to a small set of themes that characterised the process as advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

3.8.3 Round 3

3.8.3.1 The Methodology

The procedures for this round of the study followed the traditions of grounded theory. The purpose was to explore further, and in a rather more systematic and structured way than previously, the parents' views of the concept of potential, the factors affecting their children's potential and the conditions they considered necessary for their children to achieve their potential. Semi-structured interviewing was applied in round three to collect data on parents' views on issues emerging from rounds one and two i.e. parents/home environment, school and community factors associated with potential, and

conditions for its promotion. In addition it was planned to explore parents' perceptions of what was happening in the study area schools in more detail.

3.8.3.2 The Sample

Those to be interviewed were selected to serve the purpose of gaining the views and opinions of parents with a range of children of secondary, primary and nursery age. Of Patton's (1978) purposive samples, maximum variation sampling was the appropriate strategy (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). A variety of configurations of the family were chosen and the head teachers were asked to select the parental sample based on the requested criteria Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Sample Criteria for Round Three

| |
|---|
| Parents of both sex, |
| Parents with children of different ages and gender, |
| Parents from more than one type of family unit – one parent family, |
| Nuclear family both parents living in the home, |
| Nuclear family with one parent working away from home, |
| A parent local to the area |
| A parent who had moved to the area. |

The parental sample selected, in this author's view, was representative of the population of the area and this method of access to a range of parental backgrounds made this form of sampling relatively easy as the head teachers were familiar with the catchment area of their school. It had to be acknowledged, however, that the head teacher might not have chosen as representative a sample of the parent population as other methods of random sampling may have done but there was little confidence that a random sample would

have achieved the range of backgrounds because of the likelihood of a low uptake (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In the initial sample four people were interviewed in each of three schools making a total of 12. The second set of extended and structured interviews was conducted in another district of the study area. Four schools comprising all rural primary schools with rolls between 20 and 50 pupils, representative of the typical schools in the district, were selected. However, in order to ensure that the sample did not have a bias to include mainly those who had a particularly positive opinion of schooling and child development, a second sample of parents selected by different means was interviewed. For this second set of interviews a letter was sent to all parents inviting them to a meeting either in the afternoon or the evening (Appendix 1). Expressions of interest from those unable to attend were asked - with the option of answering the questions independently on paper. Twenty responses, including five on paper were received. Seventeen of those who responded were female and three male with sixteen from a nuclear family unit. Three of these had one partner who worked away from home. The children, boys and girls, were of various ages attending primary or secondary education.

3.8.3.3 The Data Gathering Procedures

A series of semi-structured interviews took place in 2001 with parents in two of the districts of the study area. The first set of interviews was on a one to one basis with the parent and the author. In the second set of interviews, parents were interviewed in groups of four and five (2002) where the author talked the group through a series of questions. The focus of the interviews was on the role of the family, the home environment, the school environment and the community in the achievement of

potential, the factors that affect potential and the conditions necessary to achieve potential. These were based on the findings from rounds one and two of the study. The questions were planned to provide adequate opportunity for dialogue and for the theme to develop. However, the questions were not necessarily relevant to all interviewees because the interviewees might not have encountered the issues directly. The questions used in the interviews were as follows:

Table 3.5 Questions for Round Three Interviews

| |
|--|
| “What do you think the school should teach to help your child achieve his potential?” |
| “What prevents your child achieving his potential at school?” |
| “How do you think the school views your role in the achievement of your child’s potential?” |
| “What would you like your role with the school to be in the achievement of your child’s potential?” |
| “Which areas of school life would you wish to influence/change?” |
| “What do you think are the key home and family influences on your child’s potential?” |
| “If you felt your child was achieving his potential - what qualifications would he have? What employment situation would he be in? What earnings would he have?” |

In addition, the first group was asked what they understood by ‘potential’ and the second group was asked to rate the importance of the responses raised.

The interviews took place in the schools. The interviews lasted about 60 minutes although some overran. Notes were taken during the interviews.

3.8.3.4 The Analysis

The procedures used for the analysis were those advanced by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994). There was anticipatory data reduction as themes were identified and these were explored in subsequent interviews. Data reduction was central to the analysis throughout where decisions had to be made on which blocks of text to code and which to extract and then select the patterns that best told the story. Open coding (Creswell 1998) was used to group similar answers according to the defined questions to bring it into manageable chunks. It was then reassembled using axial coding to try to get more precise explanations. A story line was produced through selective coding.

In order to understand the nature of the parents' experiences and their modes of thinking, the bulk of the analysis was interpretive. This helped to discover concepts and relationships in the raw data with an aim of organising it into a theoretical framework in the form of a visual picture (Creswell & Brown, 1992).

3.8.4 Round 4

3.8.4.1 The Methodology

The design for this part of the study aimed to extend the exploration of potential with respect to family and community contexts and the context of current systems of schooling. For this exploration a focus group method was used as it provided a useful

tool for exploring people's opinions and underlying thoughts (Billson, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Its flexible format allowed a collaboration and development of discussion, a stimulation of individual responses and observation of interaction (Krueger, 1994; Madriz, 2000) enriching the quality of the data when the members questioned each other and providing reality checks on each other's responses (Jarrett, 1993). It also allowed probing for attitudes and opinions and provided data and insights that were difficult to obtain in other ways (Billson, 1994; Krueger, 1994; Lamp, 1994).

The benefits of focus group research included gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which others influence individuals in a group situation. It was not assumed that the individuals in a focus group were expressing their own definitive individual view. They were speaking in a specific context, within a specific culture - a potential limitation of focus groups.

To stimulate discussion within the focus groups it was decided to use vignettes to elicit perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes from responses to stories depicting scenarios and situations. Finch (1987) describes vignettes as:

“Short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond”.

(Finch, 1987)

The vignettes (Appendix 3) had three main purposes: (a) the interpretation of actions and occurrences that allowed the situational context to be explored and influential variables to be elucidated; (b) clarification of individual judgements, and (c) discussion of sensitive experiences in comparison with the normality of the vignette.

The author facilitated the discussion around the opinions expressed. She needed to be flexible, objective, empathic, persuasive, and a good listener (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and to be expressive and oriented toward feelings, as well as instrumental and oriented toward future consequences. These latter traits included timekeeping and arbitrating when necessary (Billson, 1994). The author needed to develop rapport with group participants (Pearce, 1998, in Gearin & Kahle, 2003). An important role was to ensure equal and widespread participation, so that individuals or small groups did not dominate the conversation, that the reticent were encouraged to participate and that they elicited the fullest possible coverage of the topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A nominal group technique was used here as it has the advantage that the views of everyone are considered when the author asked each person individually for their view.

3.8.4.2 The Sample

Eight focus groups (Table 3.1) took place in two contrasting districts of the study area, four in each district. The author chaired the focus groups. In each district two focus groups comprised parents, one comprised secondary teachers and one primary teachers.

A sample of four schools in two districts of the study area was approached. The head teachers were approached by the author using the council's intranet system, provided with the context of the study and asked for their co-operation. When this was agreed they were asked to invite a representative sample of teachers and parents who would be able, willing and interested in participating in the study. The districts covered widely different social and economic catchment areas. When the Scottish Indicators for Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Executive, 2003) (Appendix 2) were studied, one district had the second highest indicator and the other the second lowest in study area.

The first district had a catchment area of a coastal strip of fishing villages and small towns, a large fishing town with a population of 12000, and small rural hamlets and towns. The area was traditionally a prosperous fishing and farming area. The indicator for multiple deprivation was 17.9%. When the distance weighting (distance from Aberdeen) was added it became 14%, the highest in the study region.

The second district had a smaller catchment area but with one of the largest primary schools in Scotland. The area was traditionally a farming area but since the discovery of oil and gas in the North Sea it had become a commuting town to Aberdeen, acquiring a large international population in addition to the traditional population (6000). The indicator of multiple deprivation was 5%. When a distance weighting was added it became 1.1%, the second lowest in the study region.

Within each district, the secondary school and one of the primary schools were chosen for the sample of teachers. None of the schools had been used in previous phases of the study. The parent sample was selected as follows. Head teachers of the four schools were asked to set up a meeting with a group of parents from a range of backgrounds, male, female, nuclear families, one parent families, local families, families who had moved to the area, and parents with children of a variety of ages. This was seen as a more purposeful sample than asking for volunteers although it may not have been as truly representative of the areas as a random sample. The groups had 6-8 people as advocated by Lamp (1994).

3.8.4.3 The Data Gathering Procedures

The focus group meetings took place in the local schools either in the morning, the afternoon or the evening – at times selected as appropriate by the participants during 2003, and in a non-threatening central location advocated as good practice for focus groups. Permission was granted by the participants to record the focus group discussions. Each meeting lasted one to one and a quarter hours. The groups were presented with two vignettes in turn, (Appendix 3) describing scenarios for two teenage boys. The first was about a disaffected boy who was opting out of school and the second, a boy whose family placed a low value on education. A third vignette, concerning a girl with additional support needs was available in case the discussion dried up or the group did not take an interest in the others presented. The third vignette was used with one of the parents' groups in district one and with the secondary teachers in district two.

3.8.4.4 The Analysis

The procedures used for the analyses were those advanced by Strauss and Corbin, (1998) and Miles and Huberman, (1994), and Wetherell et al. (1998). Following the conduct of the groups, the tapes were transcribed.

In order to keep the richness of the dialogue of the focus group meetings, scenarios (Appendix 5) were written telling the story of each focus group. To give the scenarios structure the headings from the framework that emerged in rounds three and four, were used. In addition a comparison was made in the responses between districts, between teachers and between parents in which the following questions were asked.

Table 3.6 Questions for Round Four Data Comparisons

| |
|---|
| Do teachers in Area F and Area B have the same attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions regarding the school and the community? |
| Do parents in Area F and Area B have the same attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions regarding the school and the community? |
| Do teachers and parents in Area F have the same attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions regarding the school and the community? |
| Do teachers and parents in Area B have the same attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyles and traditions regarding the school and the community? |

An attempt was made through discourse analysis to view the data from a higher stance and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the constructs underpinning the views expressed on the achievement of potential, the factors affecting the achievement of potential, and the conditions necessary for achieving potential in the study area. Elements of discursive psychology (Edley, 2001), interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions, were used to examine the ways the focus group members discussed the vignettes and to explore their position on the themes raised. Discursive psychology was the chosen methodology undertaken because when examining the ways in which people talked about things such as attitudes, memories and emotions they do so using a repertoire of terms which have been provided for them by their personal history and social context.

“Analysis is not a matter of following rules or recipes; it often involves following hunches and the development of tentative interpretative schemes which may need to be abandoned or revised.”

Wetherell & Potter (1988)

The transcripts of the focus groups were read and reread for familiarity of text (Edley, 2001) and due consideration was given to the ways of talking about potential, including the influences and conditions for its achievement. Interpretative repertoires, 'lived' ideologies and subject positions were used to make sense of the focus group data in order to provide a basis for shared social understanding.

Interpretative repertoires, the first analytical concept, are seen as ways of talking about objects and events, the building blocks of conversation and a range of linguistic resources that can be drawn upon and utilised in the course of everyday social interaction providing a basis for shared social understanding. Described by Edley (2001) as 'books on the shelves of a public library, permanently available for borrowing' or 'the pre-figured steps that could be flexibly and creatively strung together in the improvisation of a dance' they can capture the point that when people talk or think about things, they invariably do so in terms already provided for them by history. Identifying interpretative repertoires are seen to be a craft skill rather than one that can be mastered from first principles.

Ideological dilemmas are the second analytic concept for organising the data, introduced by Billig et al. (1988), to contribute to a debate on the nature of ideology. Billig and his colleagues claimed that there was an additional kind of ideology beyond intellectual ideologies called 'lived' ideologies. 'Lived' ideologies are composed of the beliefs, values and practices of a given society or culture, its way of life, its common sense. The concept of 'lived' ideology comes close to what many other social theorists understand by the term culture. Billig et al. saw the crucial features not as coherent or integrated but characterised by inconsistency, fragmentation and contradiction. 'Lived'

ideologies are rich and flexible resources for social interaction and making sense of every day issues. Billig et al. claimed that it is the productive tensions that exist between different ideological themes, which prompt the discourse. The contrary nature of 'lived' ideologies where many write them off as faulty but he argued that that ignored one of the central features of common sense that the indeterminacy of lived ideologies made them wonderfully rich and flexible resources for social interaction and everyday sense making.

The concepts of ideological dilemmas and interpretative repertoires may be seen to overlap. Both provide raw materials for social interaction and private contemplation. Both are viewed as language resources in society providing raw materials for social interaction and private contemplation. Interpretative repertoires have to be part of a culture's common sense as widely available ways of talking about different objects and events. The notion of ideological dilemmas is that there are different ways of talking about an object or event which do not necessarily arise spontaneously and independently, but develop together as opposing positions in an unfolding, historical, argumentative exchange.

The third analytic concept is **subject positions**. Althusser (1971) explored the way in which ideology creates or constructs subjects by drawing people into particular positions or identities. Subjectivity, he argued, is an ideological effect. The way that people experience and feel about themselves and the world around them is in part at least a by-product of particular ideological or discursive regimes. Althusser talked about a process of subjectification, which entails a dual sense of people as being both produced by and subjected to ideology. Holloway (1984) argued that people do not encounter discourses

pre-figured or pre-formed, instead they are reconstituted as subjects at the time of their consumption. Hall (1988) claimed that people always stood in relation to the available text or narratives and that was always in terms of a language provided by history. Subject positions are the concepts connecting the wider notions of discourses and interpretative repertoires to the social construction of people as 'locations' within a conversation. They are the identities made relevant by specific ways of talking and because those ways of talking can change both within and between conversations then so do the identities of the speakers. However, this is not to imply that identity simply follows in the wake of discourse, people are the masters of language, the creators of text. When it comes to actually doing an analysis, the question of how to identify subject positions in data is largely a matter of experience and intensive (re)reading. The trick advised by Edley (2001) is to stay aware of who is implied by a particular discourse or interpretative repertoire.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

3.9.1 Code of Practice

Because of the nature of qualitative research, consideration of ethical procedures had to be adhered to throughout the study. The SERA Code of Practice in Educational Research (SERA, 1997) provided the guidelines for the conduct of the investigations.

The study had the full support of the Education and Recreation Service of Aberdeenshire Council allowing full access to the educational establishments. Contact was made with schools and other establishments via the intranet of the council and arrangements were made directly with the head teachers of the establishments. The

local officials and the Director of Education were kept informed mainly by email. As the main method of communication in the council, this allowed quick responses and easy communication of additional information.

The council and the head teachers were informed in writing of the aims, objectives and intended procedures for data collection, analysis and reporting. The council was also notified of the specific schools that had been selected for inclusion, and the criteria for their selection. Before the formal agreement was sought with the schools, all the head teachers were contacted informally by telephone to see whether a more formal approach would be positively responded to. A range of research and practical questions were raised and discussed. Assurances about confidentiality and anonymity were given at this stage and later formally. Invitations to parents were issued by letter directly from the head teacher, and to the parents and carers of the pupils. In round three the letter was issued by the author. All participants, head teachers, teachers, non teaching staff, parents and pupils were reassured that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential.

The aims and objectives of the research were rehearsed at the beginning of each interview or focus group session. Every effort was made to put participants at their ease. Initial interviews were recorded in note form. Any prepared record sheet was shared with the participant. Later interviews and discussions were tape recorded where permission was given by the participants; no request was refused. The intended processes of transcription and data analysis were described at that stage, and the offer for participants to view the typed-up scripts was made. No request for this was received.

Schools will be informed of the output from the research.

3.9.2 Verification, Validity and Reliability

The responsibility for establishing verification rested with the author. Verification in this type of study was an active part of the process of the research and became part of the standards used to judge the quality of the study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) posed the question, “Under what conditions does the theoryfit with reality, give understanding and be useful practically and in theoretical terms?” The perspective underscored the importance of fit, understanding and utility. Furthermore in comments about verification they alternated between the terms verification and validity. The procedures for examining verification lay at different stages of the study. The literature was used for validation: the author referenced the literature to give validation for the accuracy of the findings or how the findings differ from the published literature. However, the main criteria for validity rests with being true to the information emerging from engagement with the participants. Strauss and Corbin identified criteria by which the author can judge the quality of a study such as this. (Creswell, 1998) The author referred to these criteria during the study. These included the selection of the original sample, the major categories that emerged, and events, incidents, actions that pointed to some of the major categories and the basis for theoretical sampling.

With respect to validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified the importance of an ‘audit trail’. There was a need to maintain a full and accessible record of the research as a means of encouraging researcher reflexivity and a sense of the overall logical progression of the study. This audit trail and its transparency allow others the

possibility of validating or challenging the interpretations and findings. The audit trail in this study comprised the field notes, interview and discussion transcripts and documentary analysis.

3.9.3 The Role of the Researcher

Throughout the conduct of the research, the particular characteristics of the author brought both advantages and disadvantages and may have influenced the nature of the relationship with the participants. In the conduct of research of this type, the author is the data-gathering instrument. However, the author was also known to many of the participants as an official in the council. This was at times an advantage, but also at times a disadvantage.

The advantages were that the author was familiar with the demographics of the area, its economic and political context. She was familiar with the nature of the schools and their catchment thus allowing a purposeful sample according to the type of children in the school, the size of the school and the issues within the school. She had also known the teachers and staff over a long period of years. The author believed that she had trust and integrity in the eyes of school staff in the area and that would allow people to say exactly what they thought.

The disadvantage was that the author had particular status in one area. When people were invited to attend interview, it was possible that some came because they had current issues of conflict with the school or the authority or had done so in the past. However, this possibility gave access to views from parents who seldom attend other more social events in schools, and gave a useful corrective to the very positive views of

schooling that is frequently presented by school staff and can be too readily adopted by authority staff such as this author.

The data collection was conducted mostly in the local school setting because contexts give life to and are given life by the people in them (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and aid the conduct of the research. However it may have also reinforced the attitudes of the participants to treat the author as a council representative. This had to be borne in mind and counteracted at all times during the data gathering.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS FROM THE FIELDWORK

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the findings which emerged from the analysis of each round of the fieldwork, and the rationale for undertaking the subsequent rounds of fieldwork.

4.2 Round One of the Fieldwork

4.2.1 Introduction

The aim in this first round was to concentrate on the stakeholders' portrayal of the experience of learning and to examine their concept of potential in all its complexity as it had been constructed by their experiences in life. Views, opinions and concerns on the concept of potential, the factors affecting the achievement of potential and the conditions necessary for the achievement of potential were collected.

Those chosen to be interviewed (Table 3.1) were selected to serve the purpose of gathering the widest range of views, opinions and issues regarding the concept of potential, the factors affecting potential and the conditions necessary for the achievement of potential. The questions asked (Table 3.2) were open ended to gather the widest range of views possible.

The analysis (Section 3.8.1.4) used methods to develop categories of information; interconnect categories; building the story that connected the categories; and ending with a discursive set of categories. The process was to reduce the database to a set of themes that characterised the process as advocated by Strauss & Corbin (1990).

4.2.2 Results

When the interviewees (n=20) were asked what they understood potential to be, each gave a brief reactive rather than a long considered view to the question. None of the responses gave a full picture of potential as had been revealed in the literature. The responses did, however, touch on a range of different aspects (Table 4.1).

Visual inspection of the results (Table 4.1) suggests that potential was considered by some as a lifetime objective which may or may not be fulfilled depending on the person's natural ability, determination, a bit of luck, or a challenging/supportive environment.

The interviewees were then asked to consider the factors affecting learning potential and conditions that they considered affected children achieving their learning potential. All interview notes were scrutinised and each statement classified. The statements were then cross classified before being grouped. The groups were then reduced into the key attributes and key stakeholders.

Table 4.1 Respondents' views on Potential

| Response category | Number of respondents |
|--|------------------------------|
| Maximising one's capabilities | 6 |
| What a person is able to do but not necessarily achieve | 5 |
| Academic maximum | 3 |
| Accumulation of personal input with the parental, environment and genetic interplay of factors it can change | 3 |
| Achievement given physical and intellectual ability and emotional, spiritual and psychological state of mind | 2 |
| An exploration of boundaries | 2 |
| A realization of self worth | 1 |
| An inner thing to be pulled out | 1 |
| An escalator principle – a step at a time ¹ | 1 |
| Total interviewed | 24 |

The factors affecting learning potential which emerged from the data were found to be within the child himself, the teachers, the learning and teaching, the school environment, the parents, the home environment of the child and the community the child lived in.

For the child the conditions affecting the achievement of learning potential were knowing the positive aspects of his personality, understanding the challenges of life and being able to deal with them. They should have self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-reliance, good concentration, single mindedness and focus. In interpersonal

¹ Escalator may not be the most appropriate metaphor given the context. It has not been changed to stairway as the validity of the data is being honoured.

engagements, they should be able to deal with different situations and people through having an ability to listen, question, interact with others and anticipate future situations.

The teachers were seen as an important factor for the achievement of learning potential by presenting the conditions of high expectation, a range of teaching strategies, support and challenge. A teacher's charisma was seen as a condition which stimulated achievement.

Within the factor of learning and teaching, the curriculum, programmes of study, learning and teaching strategies and recording and assessment procedures were seen as conditions for achievement.

The conditions to be provided in the internal school environment were seen as safety and security, good behaviour strategies and a caring, calm, positive, supportive and purposeful ethos: the associated conditions in the home were: an active interest in the child's progress, high parental expectations, good preschool experiences and the meeting of biological needs – nutrition, exercise, cleanliness and sleep.

The community conditions were the community expectations of education based on its catchment area.

4.2.3 Rationale for Round Two of the Fieldwork

Interesting and wide ranging data were collected in round one. The understanding of learning potential as a concept included a number of distinctive features. The factors

affecting the achievement of learning potential ranged from the characteristics of the child himself to the external environment of the home, school and community.

As a result of the range of factors and conditions that influenced learning potential identified in the findings of round one the author decided to proceed in the second round to investigate further this diverse range of key factors with a wider sample of stakeholders.

4.3 Round Two of the Fieldwork

4.3.1 Introduction

A procedure similar to the first round of interviews was repeated in round two. The sample (N=43) (Table 3.1) included representatives from the key groups throughout the study area. The participants were given the topic of the study ‘the achievement of potential’ and were asked what they understood it to mean. The themes developed in round one (Table 3.3) were used as prompts. These prompts represented the full range of categories identified in round 1 and they also gave the interviewees a starting point for thoughts and opinions in the one to one interviews and discussion in the pair interviews. The primary pupils were asked a series of questions with prompts, as required, concerning their likes and dislikes of school and what helped them to do as well as they possibly could.

The data analysis followed the same pattern as round one and was a series of interrelated activities. The themes identified in round one were the key themes used in the analysis. Using the constant comparative approach the author attempted to saturate the categories to look for instances that represented the category and to continue looking and

interviewing until the new information obtained did not further provide insight into the category. The categories were subgrouped into properties representing multiple perspectives about the categories.

4.3.2 Results

The results showed that respondents agreed with many of the views in round one and added a number of additional views. Potential was overall seen as something, which may or may not be fulfilled. One was seen to be achieving potential if one had an even profile with few peaks and troughs, if one had focus and was in control of one's learning. To achieve potential was to be successful 'at one's own level'. There were three over arching themes which emerged as the factors affecting potential: the characteristics of the child, the characteristics of the educational environment and the characteristics of the social environment (Table 4.2)

Table 4.2 The Factors affecting Potential

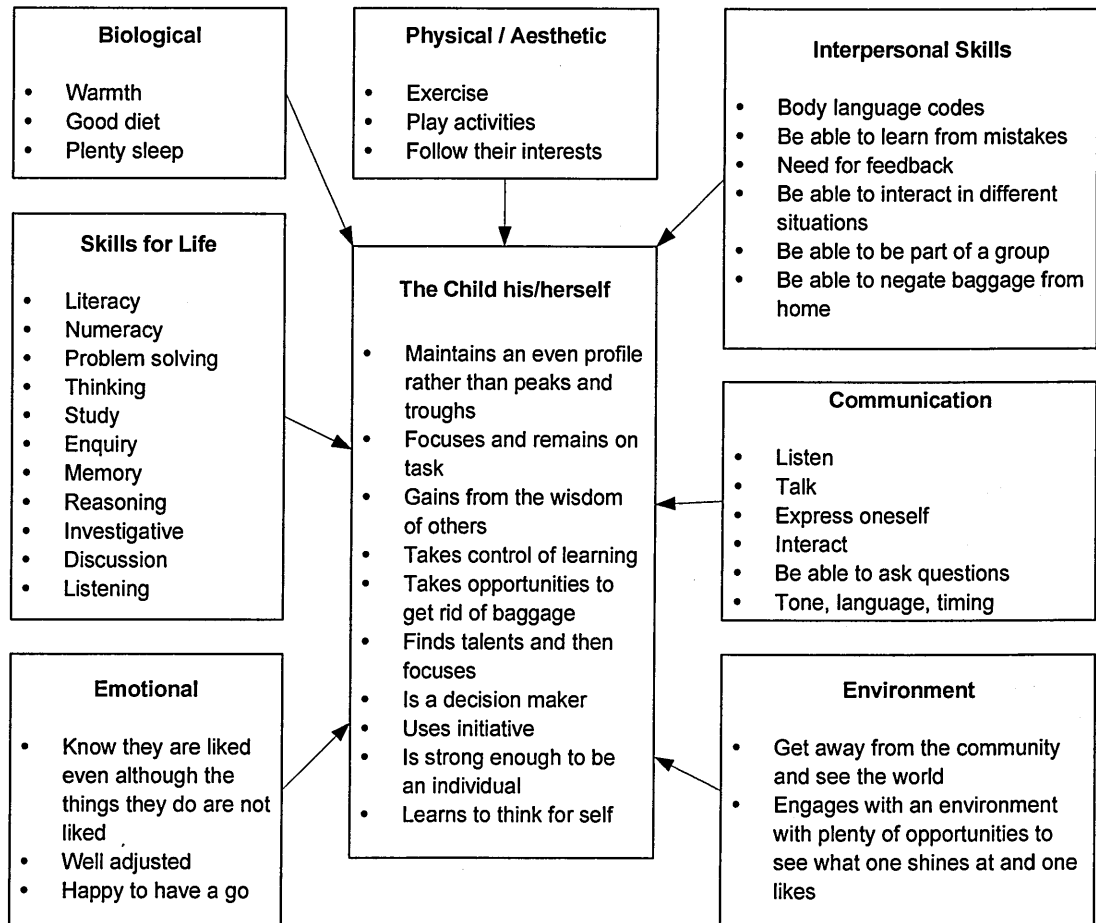
| | |
|--|--|
| The characteristics of the child | |
| The characteristics of the educational environment | Those associated with the teacher |
| | Those associated with learning and teaching strategies |
| | Those associated with the internal school environment |
| The characteristics of the social environment | The parents and home environment |
| | The wider community environment |

4.3.2.1 The Specific Characteristics of the Child

The diagram (Figure 4.1) identifies the key factors which, according to the related responses of the stakeholders, affected the child's achievement of learning potential.

The respondents appeared to give views from their professional, personal and cultural stances. The nursery teacher talked principally of the importance of a healthy diet and plenty of sleep, physical activities and opportunities to explore the environment. Early stages teachers also explored these issues. Primary teachers talked of children who brought influences from their environment into school that hindered their curriculum progress and of parents who did not value education as they saw it. Head teachers were interested in all aspects of education as they tried to manage children and teachers whilst coping with parental and political issues. They indicated the importance of home/school relationships and took the view that it was important to communicate with parents. Their stance, however very often indicated what they thought was good for the parents. This was reflected in the activities and projects that they said that they set up to improve relationships e.g., curriculum evenings which had poor attendance. The educational psychologist and education officers were more interested in discussing the child's attributes and needs and the resources that could be provided to meet these needs.

Figure 4.1 Findings on the Theme – the Child



Children were seen to be achieving their potential if they maintained an even profile rather than showing peaks and troughs, if they stayed focused and remained on task, gained from the wisdom of others, took control of their learning, were strong enough to be individuals in outlooks and were able to think for themselves.

The conditions affecting the child's potential were seen as biological, physical/aesthetic, emotional and social/interpersonal. The biological conditions included warmth, good diet, plenty of sleep; the physical/aesthetic included exercise, play activities, following the child's interests; emotional factors included knowing they were liked even although

there were things they did that were not liked; and social/interpersonal included being able to learn from mistakes, being able to interact in different situations and being able to negate 'baggage' from home.

Further conditions necessary for achieving potential were skills for life and communication. Skills for life included literacy, numeracy, problem solving, thinking skills, study skills, enquiry, memory, reasoning and investigative skills. In communication, listening, talking, expressing oneself, interacting, being able to ask questions and use of tone, language and time were identified. Engagement in an environment with a variety of different activities was seen as necessary for the child's optimal development.

4.3.2.2 The Characteristics of the Educational Environment

Three themes emerged which were specifically associated with the educational environment – the characteristics – personal and professional – of the teachers, the teaching and learning strategies in the classroom and the internal school environment.

The Personal and Professional Characteristics of the Teachers

The responses regarding teachers as an influence on achieving potential turned out to be very rich and thick in information. This reflected the diverse way in which many of the respondents saw the teacher as the key influence on a child's education. From the data analysis, a number of clusters emerged relating to management, teaching skills, curriculum, relationships, personal characteristics and relationships with children (Figure 4.2 and Table 4.3).

Figure 4.2 Findings on the Theme – the Teacher

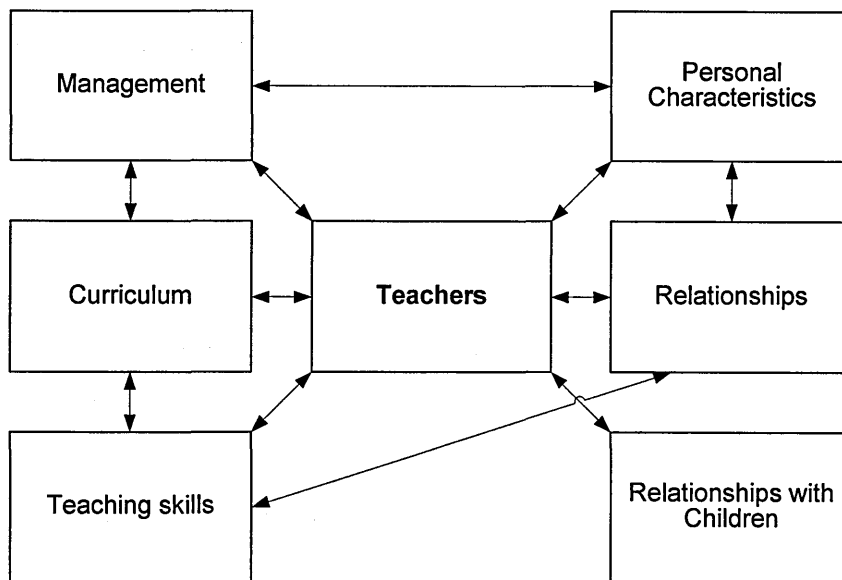


Table 4.3 Conditions for Achieving Potential Related to the Teachers

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Management | Behaviour management |
| | Organisational skills |
| | Classroom management |
| Teaching skills | Teaching methods |
| | Teaching styles |
| | Learning styles |
| Curriculum | Subjects |
| | Systems |
| Personal Characteristics | Experience of life |
| | Personality |
| | Positive attitudes |
| | Adapt to change |
| Relationships | Interpersonal skills |
| | Communication |
| | Network to the community |
| Relationships with children | Know children and inspire children |

The management conditions for the teacher were seen as: having a good behaviour framework in place, being consistent and fair with positive behaviour strategies and sanctions where appropriate, having a high level of organizational skills with meticulous planning and recording procedures then action on results and good class management in such a way that all knew what was happening all of the time. Where teaching skills were concerned it was considered that the teachers should provide a range of teaching methods, direct teaching, activity based teaching, reflection and mediation, varied learning and teaching styles to suit the needs of different children. Teachers should be knowledgeable of the curriculum and its pathway to successful teaching. Teachers should also have excellent interpersonal skills, have a keen eye, good listening skills, good self-expression and know how to speak to children and young people. Relationships between teachers, pupils and parents should be open and trusted. Teachers should have a good communication capacity and be part of the community network.

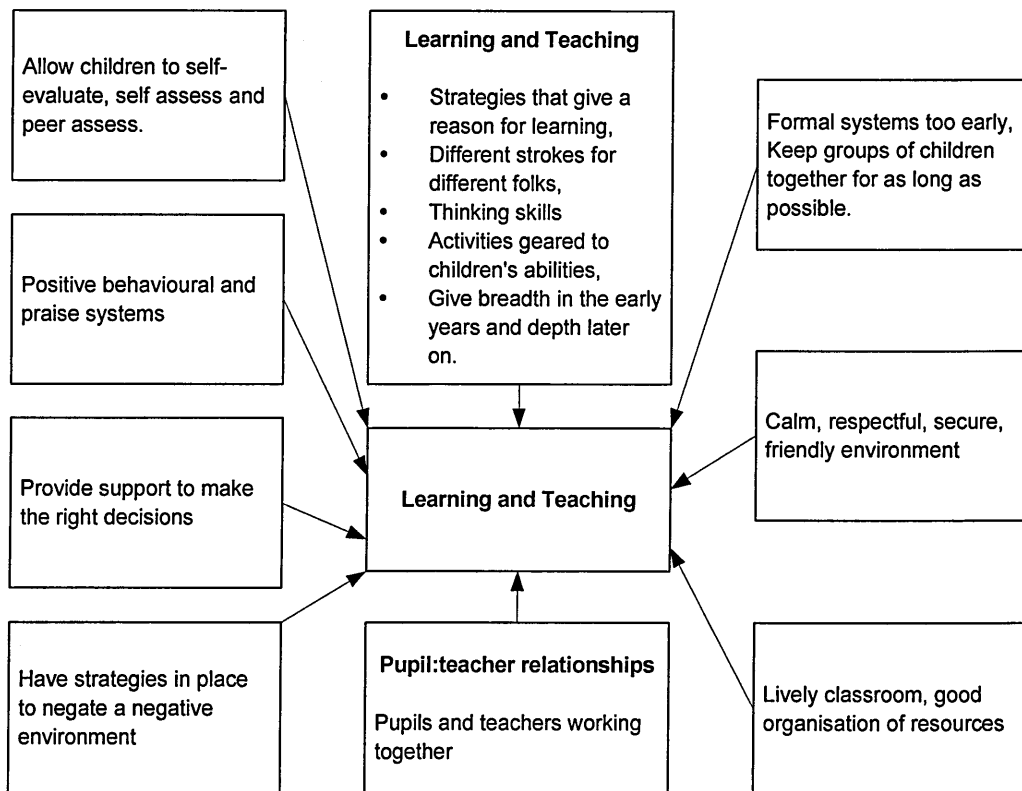
Beyond the management, teaching skills, knowledge of the curriculum and interpersonal skills there was an additional condition that was identified – the teacher's personal characteristics and how they related with children and young people. The teacher was seen as someone who must know the young person, their needs, their 'baggage' and their capabilities, and must be able to meet their needs, and to challenge and inspire. Characteristics mentioned were: good body language, enthusiasm and positive attitudes.

All respondents commented on the personal characteristics of the teachers and others who had influenced their own potential e.g., the Boys' Brigade Leader who allowed the young boy to see a world beyond his community. Teachers were considered to have a

strong influence on the pupils' learning – giving them confidence to master necessary curricular material.

Learning and Teaching

Figure 4.3 Findings on the Theme – Learning and Teaching

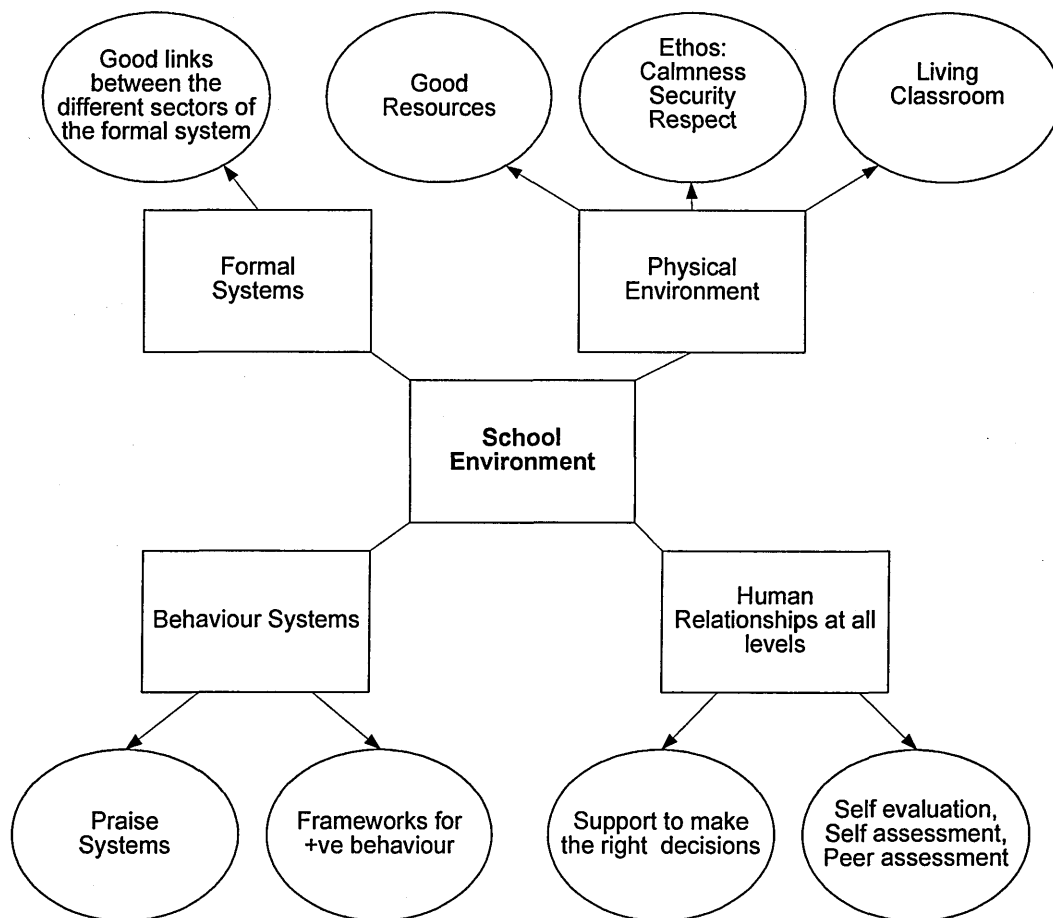


A number of themes emerged in the responses concerned with learning and teaching characteristics (Figure 4.3). Seen as important were pupils and teachers working together. Opportunities for pupils taking responsibility for their learning through self-assessment and peer assessment with support and within boundaries were seen as vital. The classroom, the centre of learning, should be lively and well resourced and have an ethos of calmness and respect. Learning and teaching strategies which emerged

included the provision of learning intentions, the teaching of thinking skills and an activity based learning environment to meet the needs of all pupils.

The internal Internal School Environment

Figure 4.4 Findings on the Theme – Internal School Environment



The internal school environment was divided into four sections: the physical environment with an ethos of calmness, well resourced and having active learning, the behaviour system with frameworks for positive behaviour and praise systems, the provision of support and challenge to make the right decisions and the importance of the links between the various sectors of the formal system. The learning and teaching and internal school environment emerged as having similar characteristics, one classroom

related and the other whole school. The key conditions identified were the behaviour systems and conditions, an ethos which was calm, secure and trusting, with learning and teaching strategies which provided an active, living classroom.

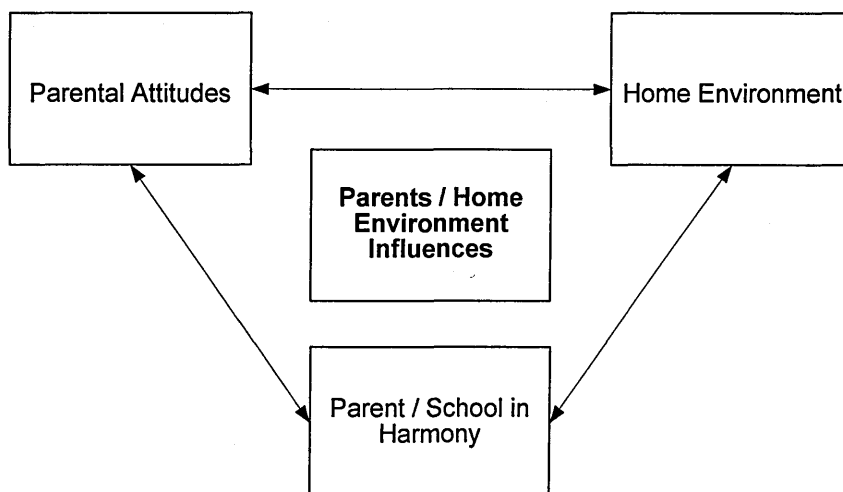
4.3.2.3 The Characteristics of the Home and Social Environment

The final two themes related to aspects of the child's life outside the school and were associated with the parents and the home environment and with aspects of the wider community environment.

The Parents/Home Environment

The learning potential factors related to the parents and the home environment are grouped (Figure 4.5). The findings indicated views that the key conditions for the achievement of potential were the attitudes of the parents and their expectations, and the home environment provided for the child or young person.

Figure 4.5 Findings on the Theme – Parents/Home Environment Influences



Most of the respondents expressed the view that parental attitudes to school were transferred to their children. The respondents told how parents who had a positive view of school tended to transfer their views to their children. The children would generally settle well at school, respect the school rules and work towards achieving them according to their ability. Those parents would encourage their children to participate fully in the life of the school and would themselves support social and academic activities. Those parents who had a negative view of the school transferred this view to their children. The children consequently showed less respect for the staff, the other pupils and the school policies and resources. When conflict arose children tended to take the view of the school from their parents. Those parents who had had poor experiences at school often did not attend school-based activities, did not support their children in their learning and very often took the child's side when problems arose. It was considered that many of these would be negative and vociferous in their view of the school.

Respondents expressed the view that certain groups of parents saw education to be lifelong and a way to another lifestyle which would be different to the one that they had been part of. They would encourage and fight for the rights of their child to achieve this by visiting the school, negotiating with the teachers and pushing their children to achieve. Other parents were described as considering education to be of no consequence. They were deemed to hold the view that since there was sufficient work in the community with 'good' money there was no need for qualifications.

Respondents considered that some families appeared to set out to make the life of the school difficult. Parents would complain and exaggerate all incidents, which occurred

involving their child within the school. On some occasions, they appeared to do this to make themselves feel important and on others to make trouble. 'Often the situation became no win.' It was thought by the respondents that those who saw little value in schooling very often kept their children at home, at what the teachers felt to be mere whim. Family concerns took precedence over school. When the father arrived home from the sea or oilrigs, the child's education was interrupted by, for example, a caravanning weekend with the family departure on Friday lunchtime or a three week term time break in Florida.

The home environment of many children was seen to be very disturbing (e.g., parents involved in drugs and alcohol misuse) making it very difficult for the child to come to school, join a class and engage in the 5–14 Curriculum. Primary head teachers and teachers, reported that they were at a loss to find strategies to deal with this situation given the position regarding resources. They claimed that much of their time was taken up with social work meetings, hearings and the writing of reports when they felt that they should be engaged in learning and teaching activities.

Views were also expressed regarding the patterns of activities that children were involved in. Whenever they were able, children attended toddler groups, play groups, nurseries, etc. This was sometimes to allow parents to return to work but often, in the view of the parents, it was to give the children opportunities to mix with others or to keep them occupied.

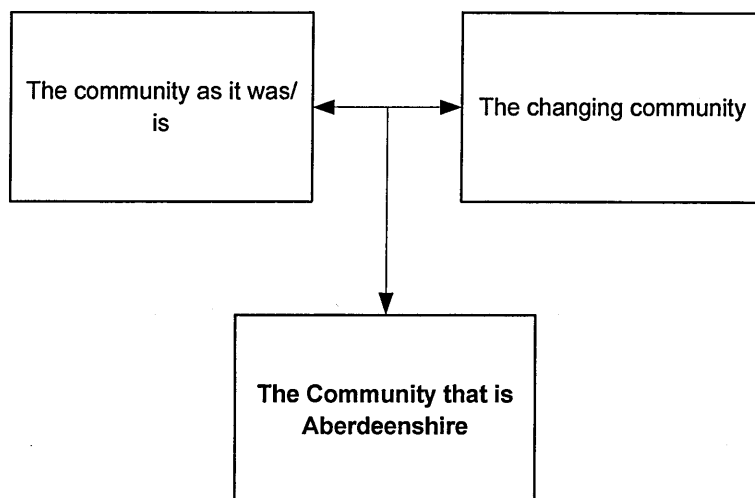
The third category identified home/school in harmony. A list of expectations for parents and for schools were identified. Parents were expected to speak to their child, ask about what was going on in school, give expectations for achieving potential, give praise and

encouragement, provide support and stimuli for their child and praise them when appropriate. Schools were expected to provide good information, a welcoming reception and make parents comfortable about coming to school. Schools were also expected to involve parents in all aspects of the child's education at all stages and to have strategies for negating the negative environment so that the children didn't have to take the weekend's problem into school.

The Community

The final factor which was seen as influential in the achievement of learning potential, was the community and its values. In the findings it was evident that the local area in which the study was undertaken was likely to have a history and a culture of its own that affected the way the people perceived the achievement of their children's learning potential.

Figure 4.6 Findings on the Theme – the Community



The respondents indicated that the communities that made up the study area had features particular to them which influenced the outcomes of education (Figure 4.6). For some, for example, in the fishing industry, education and qualifications were not considered essential to procure jobs which offered a high standard of monetary reward. This had resulted in a number of problems, which affected the smooth running of an educational system – e.g., drugs and alcohol abuse and its effects. With changes in the economic situation, the pattern of employment had changed and this might have to result in a change in the view towards education.

Respondents describing the community as it currently was, said that the catchment area was important as different communities had different problems. Some communities valued education and some did not. Some saw education as happening only between the ages of 3 and 16 and most supported the primary school more than the secondary school.

They described the changing community where there were no longer apprenticeships, where traditional industries were disappearing, where immigration from the south and Europe were changing the job markets. They then said that the communities need to become involved to value education as something to get people where they might want to go. Generally the respondents perceived the need for agencies – those within the education system, other local authority services and voluntary and private agencies to pull together to provide a secure base for the child. The view taken was that the parental influences, the home environmental influences and the community issues were key to enabling children achieve their potential. It was decided to explore these in the next rounds.

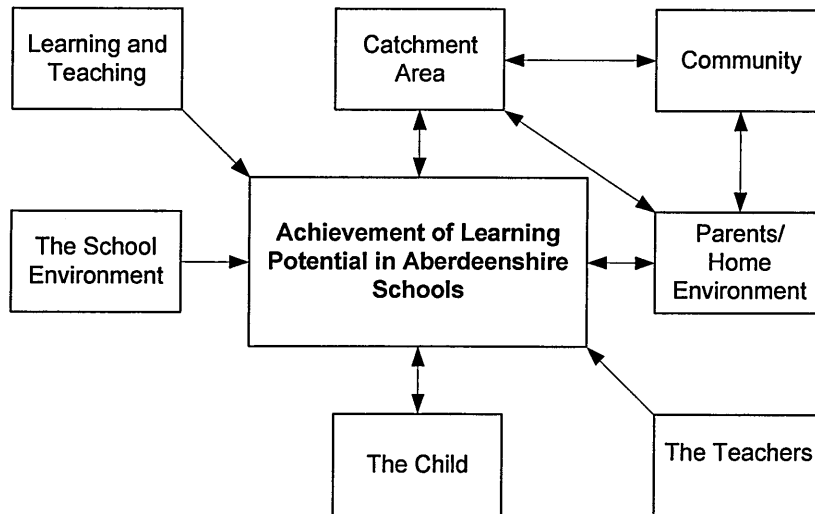
4.3.3 Rationale for Round Three of Fieldwork

The information collected and analysed in round two of the study was thick and rich. Prior to conducting round two of the study, there had been high expectations that the main factors affecting potential would be within the classroom — the child's actions, the teacher's influence, and the classroom environment. These factors did emerge as important with some rich data provided but so also did the unique character of the area, the parents, the home environment and community influences.

The findings reflected the views of the respondents interviewed, mainly teachers or parents who were seen to be comfortable with the present school systems. The author considered that the views might represent only those people with a particularly positive opinion of schooling and child development.

There was strong emphasis on schools and teachers, offering parents information and support rather than exploring genuine partnerships between home and school. Of the factors and conditions affecting the achievement of learning potential below in Figure 4.7 it was decided that round three of the study should consider in greater depth the parents' views on parents/home environment, the school and community factors associated with learning potential and the conditions for its promotion which emerged from rounds one and two and to explore further and in greater depth what was happening in the study area schools.

Figure 4.7 Influences on the Achievement of Potential



4.4 Round Three of the Fieldwork

4.4.1 Introduction

The purpose of round three was to explore further, and in a more systematic and structured way than previously, the parents' views of the concept of potential, the factors affecting their children's potential and the conditions they considered necessary for their children to achieve their potential.

A series of semi-structured interviews took place with parents (n=32) (Table 3.1) in two of the districts of the study area. The interviewees were initially given the context for the study and the progress to date. The focus of the interviews was given. The questions were planned to give opportunities for dialogue to allow the theme to develop. Participants in the first group were asked what they understood by 'potential' and those in the second set were asked to rate the importance of a range of these factors (Table 4.4).

The data analysis followed the same pattern as rounds one and two and was a series of interrelated activities. Themes from figure 4.7 were chosen – parents, home environment, catchment area and community in the analysis. Using the constant comparative approach the author attempted to saturate the categories to look for instances that represented the category and to continue looking and interviewing until the new information obtained did not further provide insight into the category.

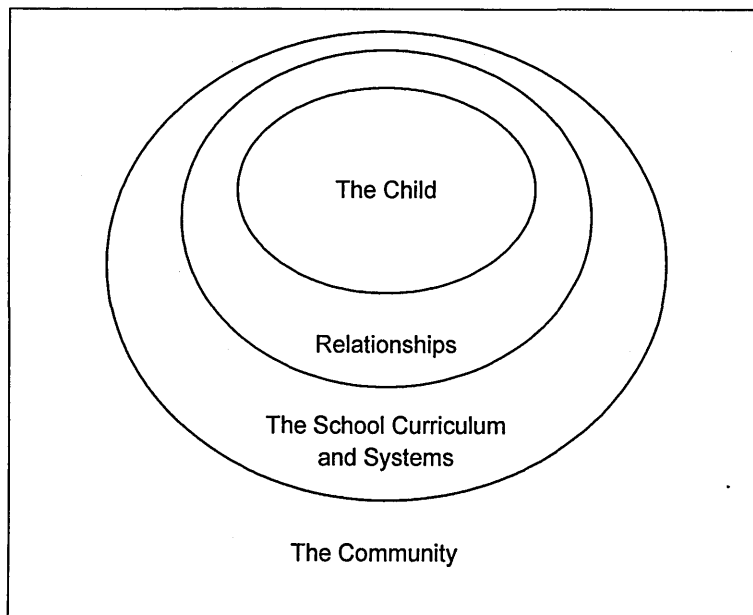
4.4.2 Results

The parents appeared to be at ease in the school for the interviews. Neither head teachers nor staff were present, allowing parents to be open in their dialogue. Parents in the first set of interviews were keen to relate the issues to their own child, family background, own school and their view of the community. In the second series of interviews the parents were self-selected volunteers, some of whom apparently had issues they felt strongly about either concerning the school or the education authority, and they used the interview as an opportunity to express their views.

A framework emerged as a result of talking with and questioning parents (Figure 4.8). From the analysis greater detail associated with factors already identified were recorded and new factors affecting the achievement of potential emerged. The responses were reflected in a framework of concentric circles with the child at the centre as in previous rounds, the core to achieving potential. Key influences were seen to be relationships between the child and the parents, the child and his peer group and the child and the teacher. Encircling the relationships was the school, its structure, its systems, its processes and its ethos. The school system was seen to influence achievement but was

not challenged by the parents only commented upon. The whole framework was set in the immediate community with its particular beliefs, values and traditions towards education.

Figure 4.8 Framework of Factors Influencing the Achievement of Potential



The parents identified both 'in school' and 'out of school' influences on their child's potential. The teachers' and the head teachers' attitudes were seen as very important. The attitudes of friends in and out of school were also seen as important but those of other children either in school or in the community who were not friends were not regarded important.

Table 4.4 Rating of the Influences on the Achievement of the Child's Potential (as a percentage of the responses n=32)

| Influences on the achievement of potential | | VI | I | NI | Influences on the achievement of potential | | VI | I | NI |
|--|---|-----|----|----|---|---|----|----|----|
| In School Influences: | Y | 40 | 0 | 0 | Out of School Influences: | Y | 40 | 10 | 0 |
| The attitude of the teacher | Y | 100 | 0 | 0 | The attitude of friends | Y | 85 | 30 | 5 |
| The attitude of the Head Teacher | Y | 80 | 20 | 0 | The attitude of other children | Y | 30 | 50 | 60 |
| The attitude of friends | Y | 60 | 30 | 0 | The attitude of the family | Y | 95 | 0 | 0 |
| The attitude of other children | Y | 30 | 65 | 5 | The attitude of other relatives | Y | 50 | 40 | 5 |
| The subjects taught | Y | 70 | 25 | 0 | The attitude of people in the neighbourhood | Y | 20 | 50 | 15 |
| How the subjects are taught | Y | 95 | 0 | 0 | The attitude of others in the community | Y | 30 | 35 | 65 |
| How the class is organised e.g. seating arrangement, groupings | Y | 60 | 40 | 0 | Television at home | Y | 50 | 30 | 5 |
| The time of the day subjects are taught | Y | 25 | 60 | 10 | Videos at home | Y | 45 | 35 | 5 |
| Praise systems or lack of praise systems | Y | 60 | 30 | 0 | | Y | | | |
| The child's own motivation | Y | 100 | 0 | 0 | | Y | | | |

VI — very important, I — important, NI — not important, Y — yes, N — no.

4.4.2.1 The Child

Overall, parents saw their children achieving their potential if they were happy, doing what they were interested in and successful at their own level. High esteem, compassion, independent thinking and hard work were seen as the top factors necessary to achieve learning potential. The first set of parents came up with the various key words and phrases for children achieving potential. They were unsophisticated in how they expressed their views but the meaning was clear.

"He should be successful at his own level; be happy and motivated in all he does; take an interest in a wide range of activities; and be willing to tackle new challenges."

"He is good with his hands."

"She's bossy; she'll have her own business."

"He knows what he wants."

The second group confirmed and extended these views (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Respondents Views on their Child's Achievement of Potential (as a percentage of the 20 parents interviewed in the second group).

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----|--|----|-----------------------------------|----|
| Happy | 90 | Has peace of mind | 30 | Considerate | 15 |
| Doing what he/she is interested in | 50 | Has good qualifications | 25 | Tackles new ideas with enthusiasm | 15 |
| Successful at his/her own level | 35 | Interested in a wide range of activities | 20 | Ambitious | 10 |
| High self-esteem | 35 | Know his/her mind | 20 | Has lots of friends | 10 |
| Compassionate | 35 | Good communicator | 20 | Grabs opportunities as they come | 5 |
| Independent | 35 | Motivated | 15 | Wealthy | 0 |
| Working hard | 35 | Knows where he/she is going | 15 | | |

4.4.2.2 Relationships

The Teachers

All parents saw the teacher as a key enabler for their child achieving his potential or a barrier to learning. The early stages teacher was seen as the most important.

Parents' comments included:

"If my son likes the subject then he will learn. The teachers are an important element. The way they put the subject over makes it interesting."

"My child talks about the good teachers. They push her more."

"The education authority should keep an eye on the teachers to make sure they are suited to the group they teach."

"Justin had a wasted year. It took a year to sort out."

Parents felt it essential that the teachers had a love of their subject and a teaching style to motivate the child to like the subject

"This goes with the teacher's attitude. An inspired teacher is wonderful."

"The teaching methods are down to the individual teacher."

"The way the teacher puts things over matters."

More than one parent said that a good old-fashioned teacher was best – strict discipline.

One parent talked about her daughter's achievement in history following the appointment of a new teacher.

“She became interested, was motivated to do well and looked forward to the next class. Now she is going to university to study social history and architecture.”

The Peer Group

Parents saw peer group influences as important factors in the later stages of the primary school and throughout secondary school. Parents interviewed worried about which class their child would be placed in at the secondary school because of the strength of this influence.

“The children’s peers are the top influence. This is fortunate for one child and unfortunate for the other. Our job is to be vigilant re truancy, homework etc.”

“What would happen if they got in with a bad lot. My daughter is 16. If her friends are keen, she’ll keep up, if not she won’t. She won’t listen to us.”

“She wants to choose the subjects her friends choose.”

“He wants to be popular with his friends.”

“He exaggerates after he has been with his friends.”

The Parents

When the parents were asked about the relationships between parents and school they gave the response that they believed that they were ‘part of the loop’. Most felt consulted when appropriate, almost all felt that the school saw them in the supportive role and almost all felt that the school had a job to do and should inform them only when necessary. One parent felt that more opportunities should be made available to

share knowledge and understanding of the child's needs and aptitudes, as they knew the children in different contexts.

Responses included:

"The school knows more about education than me."

"I hope the teacher knows better than me."

"I can't expect everything to be done to my point of view."

"The school's role is to teach, the child's role is to learn, my role is to encourage the right attitude."

"The school is usually right."

"I would like to be fully consulted. I would also like to have my child included in discussions about her education."

4.4.2.3 Educational Context – the School System

When considering the conditions necessary for the achievement of learning potential in the school system the curriculum, communication, discipline and after school clubs were mentioned. In the small schools composite classes, classes with more than one age group and classes shared by more than one teacher gave cause for concern.

The Curriculum

The first group of parents identified their preferred curriculum, which informed the choices offered to the second group of parents (see Table 4.5). This table thus reflects the responses from 20 parents. However, when asked about their curriculum ratings a range of perceptions were also expressed:

“Subjects are important but children should be allowed to learn at their own pace and not be pushed to achieve targets.”

“Where has child centred education gone? We must foster enquiry and lively minds. We must provide experiences for learning.”

“The curriculum should be in partnership with the home as many subjects are started at home.”

“I would like a more flexible curriculum attitude when it comes to the changeover from 2nd to 3rd and 4th year.”

“80% of course and exam work involves a good understanding of English. There is a large % of children with a poor understanding of English and therefore the system is failing them by not providing them with more practical subjects for them to be achievers in.”

Table 4.6 Preferences in Curriculum (as a percentage of the responses n=20)

| School Subject | VI | I | NI | DNI | School Subject | VI | I | NI | DNI |
|----------------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-------------------------------|----|----|----|-----|
| <i>Core Skills</i> | | | | | <i>Vocational Skills</i> | | | | |
| Reading | 95 | 5 | 0 | 0 | Home Economics | 40 | 40 | 20 | 0 |
| Writing | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Business Skills | 55 | 35 | 10 | 0 |
| Arithmetic | 95 | 5 | 0 | 0 | Technology | 50 | 45 | 5 | 0 |
| Mathematics | 95 | 5 | 0 | 0 | <i>Expressive Skills</i> | 45 | 45 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Social Subjects</i> | | | | | Art and Design | | | | |
| Modern Studies | 20 | 70 | 5 | 0 | PE | 60 | 35 | 5 | 0 |
| History | 35 | 65 | 0 | 0 | Drama | 35 | 55 | 10 | 0 |
| Geography | 40 | 60 | 0 | 0 | Music | 30 | 55 | 15 | 0 |
| <i>Science</i> | | | | | Instrumental music | 30 | 60 | 10 | 0 |
| Biology | 55 | 45 | 0 | 0 | Life Skills | 70 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| Physics | 40 | 55 | 5 | 0 | Listening and talking | 85 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| Chemistry | 40 | 55 | 5 | 0 | Thinking Skills | 80 | 15 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Languages</i> | 40 | 40 | 20 | 0 | Health | 70 | 30 | 0 | 0 |
| German | 30 | 30 | 20 | 0 | Social Skills | 85 | 35 | 0 | 0 |
| French | 35 | 50 | 0 | 0 | Psychology | 20 | 70 | 55 | 5 |
| Other Language | 20 | 30 | 25 | 5 | Communication | 80 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Religious Education</i> | | | | | <i>Local Studies</i> | | | | |
| Christianity | 10 | 45 | 30 | 5 | Culture, history and Language | 45 | 55 | 0 | 0 |
| Other Faiths | 15 | 30 | 35 | 5 | | | | | |

VI — very important, I — important, NI — not important, DNI — definitely not important

When respondents talked about what should be taught in school they all considered that the basic skills were top priority as a certain level of standards were necessary for future employment. Appropriate emphasis, they said should be placed on the 3Rs, a focus placed upon the needs and abilities of the child and an appropriate pace set. One parent said the focus should be on work not play.

Life skills were seen as key, covering talking, listening, relationships and communication, and they felt these should be taught as a preparation for work and adult life. One parent saw the promotion of life skills as the family's task but acknowledged that some families' influences might not prepare the child for the future. Vocational skills were seen to be important in the secondary school, with most parents saying that children should have a curriculum that emphasised the skills to earn a living especially when they were 15/16 years old. The creative and expressive arts were seen by almost all parents to be important as they assisted in the development of self-esteem and confidence. Some parents said that they should be offered as tasters, if not full subjects in the arts. Most felt that the breadth and content of the curriculum in primary schools was good but in secondary school, vocational and creative subjects should have more emphasis.

The first group of parents identified the issues above, which informed the choices offered to the second group of parents (Table 4.6). This table thus reflects the responses from 20 parents.

Table 4.7 Views on Communication, Discipline, Composite Classes and Extra Curricular Activities (as a percentage of the responses n=20)

| Prompts given to parents | A | B | C |
|---|----|----|----|
| The manner in which the school sends me information. e.g. newsletters, | 95 | 5 | 0 |
| The manner in which the school communicates with me. e.g. letters, meetings, telephone calls | 85 | 15 | 0 |
| The manner in which the schools deals with the children's behaviour. e.g. discipline policy, exclusions, alternatives to exclusion. | 80 | 20 | 0 |
| The manner in which the classes are organised e.g. composite classes. | 75 | 10 | 15 |
| The manner in which the school is managed. e.g. policies and practice of the head teacher. | 70 | 20 | 5 |
| The type, the amount and the manner in which the school provides extra curricular activities. e.g. sporting activities, study support. | 65 | 34 | 0 |

A — Am happy with the present position

B — Would like changes to the present system

C — Am not happy with the present position but cannot see how changes can be made

Communication

Overall, most of the parents were happy with most of the aspects that made up the ways of working in the schools. A few wanted a change in communication methods. One parent said that good communication and therefore relationships between home and school was vital and teachers did not always have enough time/support to do this job fully. All the parents who made comment on the ingredients for a real relationship with the school mentioned communication, requested more open communication.

“The TIME to really communicate.”

Good communication between the teachers actually teaching your child and the parents.”

“Good communication and trust in the teaching ability at the school.”

“Communication, understanding, respecting each person’s views and listening.”

“Open communication and a truthful exchange of views.”

“Parents need to support the school and the staff in the education of the child and in disciplining the child. Parents must inform school of any problems at home so that the teaching staff can act accordingly. Teachers need to be open and willing to talk to parents.”

“Both sides need to appreciate the benefits of working together. Open communication.”

“Being able to listen and get on well with all teachers. Believing your child can do wrong things.”

“Communication between parties, compromise and co-operation.”

“Approachable teachers, encouragement from parents, support instead of criticism.”

From what was said there appeared to be an underlying view that dialogue between home and school could be more open and should be transparent, the main criteria required being time and attitudes. Communication was seen as a key condition for the achievement of potential.

Discipline

A few parents wanted a change in the code of discipline especially in the secondary school. One parent said that discipline was now a problem because no punishment was in place which could deal effectively with bad behaviour. One set of parents felt the head teacher should take a stronger stance in the implementation of the discipline code.

“She is not fair to all pupils. She has dual standards. She considers the environment of the pupil and is more lenient on those with difficult parents. There should be one rule for all.”

After School Activities

After-school activities were seen as an important element of education. Parents said it was education in an informal setting. The barrier in the form of lack of volunteers to lead the activities was mentioned by most.

“We would like football, he is not good at it but likes it.”

“After school activities are great for kids but difficult to get folk to take them.”

“There is nothing for the younger ones.”

Other Issues

A few raised the issue of composite classes but could not see an alternative in a small rural school. The issue about the continuity of learning was identified where the head teacher shared a class to allow for administration and management duties especially at times when there was a shortage of teachers.

4.4.2.4 Social Context

Parents, Family and Home Environment

When asked what the key factor for the achievement of potential was almost all saw the way the family lived, as one of the most important. Detailed views were expressed on exactly what a supportive setting entailed:

“It is essential that the children have a good routine – mum at home, homework at four, supper at five, shower at six, and bed at eight.”

“Since my husband left, I see a difference in the way the children behave. They have become more settled, better behaved and their attitude is better to each other. There is no arguing now.”

“The family is the core. Our job is to set the tone and provide the boundaries. The children have to be encouraged, praised and pushed.”

The parents made critical comment on other parents’ behaviour and attitudes:

“Too much time is spent stuck in front of TVs and computers.”

“Parents are more interested in their own careers than being there for their children.”

“Other children can be hard on children not wearing the designer clothes, who can’t afford school trips and after school activities. This is the parent talking.”

“Parents want their children to attend all kinds of activities but few are actually prepared to do anything about it themselves.”

Community Resources

The community factors which the respondents related to the achievement of potential were seen as the provision of resources such as the library, the provision of clubs and societies, the opportunities to meet people across the age groups. Meeting pupils from other schools and mixing with a wide range of people from different age groups and walks of life was seen as a positive experience.

“There is a need for activities to keep the kids off the streets.”

“It is important to take part in community events e.g. football galas to meet children from other schools.”

“We like organized activities as other children influence and they follow like sheep.”

Community Characteristics

The cultural aspect of community was mentioned when parents spoke of the community pulling together in a disaster. Parents also said that the culture of the community affected whether young people stayed on at school or not and what values they were developing for their future lives.

“There are good and bad influences in the community.”

“When friends leave school and have money in their pocket, or a car — why study!”

“You need to restrict where you let your children go as in the other part of (this area) there are drugs and bullies.”

“My husband is on the rigs. We have to take our holidays when he is at home but there are parents who take their children off

school on Friday afternoons to go away for the weekend in the caravan.”

4.4.3 Rationale for Round Four of the Fieldwork

The findings from round three developed the themes from rounds one and two using a parental perspective and introduced two additional themes: the influence of the peer group and the notion of relationships. The learning of the child at the centre was seen to be influenced by relationships with the teacher, the peer group and the family within a given school system. While this recognised the social constructivist nature of learning, with the development of the individual being heavily scaffolded by his interactions and engagement with others immediately around him, the wider social context in the form of the characteristics of the catchment area of the secondary school were also identified as critical in shaping learning and life outcomes. Aspects of the cultural characteristics of the district was therefore the focus for further enquiry. The final phase of fieldwork was accordingly set in contrasting social and cultural districts in the study area.

4.5 Round Four of the Fieldwork

4.5.1 Introduction

The aim of round four was to extend the exploration of the concept of children reaching their potential, particularly with respect to the perceived role of the community and family contexts and values. For this exploration a focus group method was used as it provided a useful tool for exploring people’s opinions and underlying thoughts (Section 3.8.4) Its flexible format allowed a collaboration and development of discussion, a stimulation of individual responses, an observation of interaction when the members

questioned each other, and reality checks on each other's responses. It also allowed probing for attitudes and opinions and provided data and insights that were difficult to obtain in other ways.

The stories (Table 4.8, 4.9, 4.10) in the vignettes (Appendix 3) set a context for open discussion of many of the issues raised in previous rounds of the study, and presented situations which the aims and values of different social groups were seen to be in potential conflict.

Table 4.8 Story 1 (Craig) told of a boy aged 14.

| |
|---|
| Craig had the ability to undertake exams successfully and move to further or higher education. |
| He had a challenging attitude towards the school system resulting in exclusion. |
| The family did not place a high value on education with the mother not completing her education. |
| The lifestyle was that of smoking, drinking, and the odd fight. There was plenty food; clothes and money. |
| The tradition was to leave school at the earliest leaving date and get job with immediate return. |
| The expectation of the mother was for the boy to stay on at school and take his exams. |
| The expectation of the boy was to leave school and get a job at the chicken factory. |

Table 4.9 Story 2 (James) told of a boy almost 16.

| |
|---|
| James had the ability to take his exams and move on to higher education. |
| He had a positive attitude to education, worked hard and was likely to get good results. |
| The father did not value education beyond school and expected his son to leave school, work on the farm and eventually take over the farm. There was no need for further education. |
| The lifestyle was that of the farmer as a pillar of the community. |
| The tradition was that the farm should pass from one generation to the next as it has done for 200 years. |
| The expectation of the father was that the boy left school, work on the farm and eventually take over the farm as had happened over the generations. |
| The expectation of the boy was that he passed his exams with good grades, moved to a university away from the vicinity of home and then possibly work abroad. |

Table 4.10 Story 3 (Rose) was 11 and was ready to move to secondary education.

| |
|---|
| Rose had physical and mental disabilities. Although in mainstream at present the professionals felt that she would be better placed in a sheltered setting. |
| Rose was happy at school and coped as well as could be expected. |
| The family valued education and expected that their daughter would be subject to the current policy of inclusion. |
| The tradition had been that children with learning difficulties had been educated in a sheltered setting with support and care rather than challenge. |
| The parents expected their daughter to be educated in mainstream education. |
| The professionals expected that Rose would be placed in a Curriculum Support Unit. |

Different analysis procedures were used to view the data from different angles. In order to keep the richness of the dialogue of the focus group meetings, scenarios (Appendix 4) were written telling the story of each focus group. To give the scenarios structure, the factors affecting learning potential which had emerged in earlier rounds were used for

one level of analysis: the community characteristics, the school system and relationships. An attempt was then made through discourse analysis to identify the interpretative repertoires – the ways of talking about objects and events which were utilised in the course of the focus group discussions as the basis for shared social understanding.

4.5.2 Results

4.5.2.1 Similarities and Contrasts among the Focus Groups

The scenarios focused attention on each individual focus group outcomes and this facilitated a comparative view of two districts in the study area through the eyes of two different sections of the population — parents and teachers. The focus groups were located in two local districts, Area F and Area B, selected on the basis of their different demographic characteristics (Appendix 2).

4.5.2.2 Teachers: Area F and Area B, Secondary and Primary

Educational Context — School System

The teachers from Area F expressed the view that they let whole groups of children down within the school system and that in some way that cycle had to be broken into. The children identified as most affected were working class children. For example one teacher said:

"You cannot expect a working class mother to nurture her child in a middle class way so you cannot expect a middle class education system to work for all."

(Teacher from Area F)

Teachers believed that the education system had the child from the age of five and if it had not succeeded then the system must be wrong for not having met the needs of the child. The Area F primary teachers considered that the children are really well looked after in the primary school. They spoke of how self-esteem rose when additional adults were present to give one to one contact. They considered that this safety and closeness was seen to disappear when they went to the secondary, where the child became just a number.

“Maybe there’s a lack of supervision at the secondary. You know we care what happens to ours as we really look after them here. Once they are up with the other schools there’s not the same care or personal touch.”

(Primary teacher from Area F)

Both the secondary and the primary teachers felt that minds had to be changed about how the school offered learning experiences to pupils and part of that was that the school curriculum had to be right for all not just the academically able and motivated.

“We’re maybe making life more comfortable for him or maybe getting him to come to school. Are we addressing his needs or his potential?”

(Secondary teacher from Area F)

In contrast, the secondary teachers from Area B expressed the view that secondary schooling was set at ‘one size fits all’ and if individuals couldn’t or didn’t want to conform, they shouldn’t be there. They indicated that they were there to teach a subject not to cater for unruly children — that was the job of the guidance team. They felt that it was not a problem in some areas but they could see that it would be a problem in Area

F because of the problems in the community and the value many families placed on education.

“His guidance teacher would be well aware of the background and would know if useful interventions can be made. You are not going to tell me that it is going to rear its head at this stage. Surely somewhere along the line this would have been picked up long before he got to 16.”

(Secondary teacher from Area B)

In contrast, the primary teachers in Area B expressed the view that there was more to education than academic subjects but that now even vocational and expressive arts courses had exams and assessments, thus excluding those people who did not cope with exams. These teachers talked in disapproving terms about the priority given to academic subjects when achievements in other disciplines were just as important, fulfilling and rewarding.

“A lot of the traditional subjects that used to be non-academic have become more academic as they have written papers e.g. PE. Does it have to be that way? It has drifted that way because evidence is required. PE has a written paper but it should be a practical subject.”

(Primary teacher from Area B)

Social Context — Community Characteristics

The teachers in Area F were very conscious of the community context in which they worked. They felt that it was one where, for a large percentage of the pupils, education was not seen to be valued. The expectation had been that the boys went to the fishing

and the girls married fishermen, and though the life at sea was hard, the rewards were good with a high disposable income and a lifestyle for the choosing. There was plenty work for the non-qualified in the fish processing and other service industries and life was 'ok'.

"How long will the fish processors keep going? They will only import fish for so long. The jobs which absorbed the kids when they left school may no longer be there in the future."

(Secondary teacher from Area F)

However, the teachers expressed the view that that the community had not come to terms with the changing economic climate where there was decommissioning of boats and the importing of foreign fish for the processing factories. The problems of alcohol abuse, drugs and anti-social behaviour were recognised as major issues for the community.

While the teachers in Area B commented on and recognised problems in the north east corner they did not feel part of them. The community in which they lived had a large percentage of people with high disposable income as a result of the oil and gas industry. A key difference in the catchment area characteristics was that these people were likely to be qualified to degree level and having gone through the education system were more likely to respect its value or at least know its strengths and weaknesses. The teachers felt that in their schools there would be an expectation that the pupils would remain at school to take highers, study for a degree, build a portfolio of expertise and experience to take them through any future difficult times. While they recognised that there was a

sub-section of people in their catchment area who had low expectations similar to those in Area F they did not see it as widespread.

In Area F, the teachers felt that children were very well looked after, loved and cared for but considered that often education was not a priority within some families, and there were few expectations of it. In Area B, the teachers also talked of the role of parents in the nurturing and education of their children. They said that the parents were the people who were responsible for their children at least until they were 16 years old. They said that they couldn't believe when parents said that they couldn't get their children to do things. They considered that that was the parent's job and their responsibility.

Overall, the secondary teachers in particular saw Areas F and B as different types of communities comprising people who had different values, beliefs and traditions. While the Area F teachers expressed the view that there had to be a rethink of the education system to meet the needs of the people they were failing, the Area B secondary teachers were of the opinion that the pupils had to fit the system. The primary teachers of both areas had in common the wish that priorities be placed across a wider vision of education not just the academic subjects. The teachers held the common view that the parents had to take some responsibility for the education of their children at least until they were sixteen.

4.5.2.3 Parents: Area F and Area B

Educational Context — School System

The parents from Area F expressed the view that the school system was set up for the that small group of pupils willing and able to conform to the school norms and

requirements to get grades and that both academically able and academically poor missed out on an optimum education. They thought that the school system was like a factory and they suggested some teachers considered some pupils to be 'faulty goods'. The parents felt that there was too much talk of 'academic potential' at a time when they considered children should be learning things they were interested in.

One set of parents in Area B discussed the strengths of an early assessment of all children for aptitude and capabilities putting it forward as a possible way to assess potential. The same group discussed the advantages of child centred education and meeting the needs of the individual children.

"I have this bee in my bonnet about assessment. I don't mean passing exams at critical points like the 11+. I mean assessing little children when they go into nursery to see if they have special needs, deficiencies etc. We have one of the biggest schools in Scotland so we have the opportunity to stream not from an academic point of view but to meet the needs of children to identify what child has what sort of needs. A child who is very good with his hands and technically minded should be channelled. With great tranches of pupils of the same age there must be opportunities to assess what a child is good at and where their strengths lie."

(Parent from Area B)

"Has anyone ever sat down and considered what the child is capable of?"

(Parent from Area B)

The same set of parents expressed concern that the education system had narrowed and become very academic and exam orientated. One suggestion they made was to get the children out of their normal situations and offer them new opportunities.

Parents from Area B considered that the most important part of a school was the teachers: their attitude to the children, the giving of appropriate support and building their self-esteem. They had found from their experience that teachers did not necessarily do that.

Social Context — Community Characteristics

The parents from Area F talked of the changes in the fishing and farming industries and how the deterioration in the economy of the town affected the prospects of the young. Some appeared disillusioned but others said it was no worse than anywhere else. For most it was felt there had to be change. The parents in Area B expressed the view that the people of the north east of Scotland were very local and lacking in vision.

"As part of my job I visit the chicken factory in B. The workers are mostly ex fishermen. College training in Aberdeen is available for them but they do not see its worth. It would take them outside their culture network. They believe that the chicken factory is a steady job with a steady wage so why risk doing something more demanding. The chicken factory could close at any time and these employees don't appreciate that."

(Parent from Area B)

In Area B the parents expressed the view that it was easy to have 'the good life' and that there was a danger that to have 'the good life' came to everyone without having to work

for it. They saw their own community as a mixed community although they recognised that there would be a core section with similar views to those of areas such as Area F.

The parents from Area B discussed the family and considered that what made the difference was a father on the scene, the parents' own education and the parents' attitude towards education. Parents from Area F talked of the changes in the family patterns where parents were both at work, came home tired and passed over some money for a new computer game rather than investing time in the child. They also spoke of a core that did not work and had no intention of getting a job. Grandparents who used to play the extended family role were seen now to have their own lives to live and invested less time than previous generations in their grandchildren. The Area B parents extended the family responsibilities to all adults and said adults were often unaware of the impact of their actions.

“Adults across society have to realize the impact they have on young minds. They don’t take it seriously enough.”

(Parent from Area B)

“Boys need a father figure. Me and my son are close but he still comes over to have a blether with his dad and he is 27.”

(Parent from Area F)

Children, they felt, must be valued for who they are and whatever the talents they have. They said that there were two edges to the educational sword, one where the children were pushed too far academically causing stress even mental illness and one where they were educationally neglected.

“Pushing too far causes mental health problems. A lot of parental expectations push children to the edge. You only have to see them down town on a Friday night.”

(Parent from Area B)

“The children are nourished, cared for and loved but they are educationally neglected.”

(Parent from Area F)

Parents and School Relationship

The parents in both Areas B and F expressed a keenness to be involved in the education of their children and wanted more information on what they needed to know to make a partnership with the school work. They realised that while some parents were not interested there was a large number who were very concerned with their children's education. The parents said schools saw the product and might not see the process so to get the full picture all parties should be involved. They wanted a role in the education of their children that gave them some decision-making powers. The parents from Area F felt that they were not supported when they went to visit the school on some matters. Excuses were made for any complaint or concern expressed and if they did not keep going back, causing a stir nothing would happen. They said parents knew their children well, and there had to be some reason when they didn't want to be in school. They felt teachers presented as very superior, even intimidating and condescending to parents.

“The staff can be intimidating but you have to stick to your guns if it is something you believe in. I stuck at it until I got answers.”

(Parent from Area F)

The respondents were concerned about the role of fathers and felt that employers should be encouraged to allow fathers to take time off work to be more effectively involved in their children's education. They also felt that the local businesses community should have a stronger role. The respondents challenged schools to be more confident about going to parents with problems and not just good news.

Overall, the parents wanted a full partnership with the school, and felt this was necessary to allow their children to achieve their potential. They considered that they knew their children in different and additional contexts from that of the school and thus could have valuable input in suggesting appropriate educational strategies.

4.5.2.4 The Views of Teachers and Parents in Area F

Educational Context — School System

Both teachers and parents agreed that there was generally a low expectation of educational outcomes for the children from the working classes. Children who did well in primary school very often did not achieve as well as they were expected in secondary school, and this was attributed to the loss of the personal support systems typical of the primary, and the perception that they became 'only a number' in the secondary school. This view came mainly from the parents but was also mentioned by the primary teachers. Secondary teachers did not make comment. It was agreed that success very often depended on which set the children were placed in.

Social Context — Community Characteristics

Teachers and parents from Area F expressed similar views of the community. They all recognised the changing environment due to the slump in the traditional industries and

that there had to be a change of minds with respect to the education offered and community relationships if young people were to achieve their potential within school and in their future lives.

“How long will the food processors keep going with imported fish?”

(Secondary teacher from Area F)

“Folk are turning in boats for decommissioning.”

(Secondary teacher from Area F)

“People move here because it is cheap. There are a lot of English but they are not working. There are no jobs here, no prospects here. What was the living here – fishing and farming – that’s gone. Tourism – that is the Council. F has gone downhill in the last five years. What a mess. It doesn’t help with the bad publicity on the TV.”

(Parent from Area F)

Parents and School Relationship

Parents on the whole were happy with the partnership role they had experienced with the primary school but felt ill at ease with the secondary school. The parents indicated that they found the teachers in the secondary school unapproachable and unsupportive in contrast to the primary staff whom they found helpful and caring. They judged that uneducated parents would shy away from the secondary school, as they would have the feeling of being put down.

Overall, the environmental context was giving the main cause for concern. There was a perception of a low value placed on education by a section of the community and

consequently many of the pupils were not given the opportunity to achieve their potential.

4.5.2.5 The Views of Teachers and Parents in Area B

Educational Context — School System

The parent and teacher groups in Area B both expressed the view that the school was like a factory. If one fitted in to the system one did well and if one didn't the system could not cope. The secondary teachers considered that they were employed to teach their subject and expressed a lack of interest in a holistic approach to the child.

“In primary school there is one teacher and 30 pupils. They can nurture the child. In secondary school I have 180 pupils.
‘There, there, there’ - they do have a guidance teacher.”

(Secondary teacher in Area B)

This contrasted with the primary teachers and the parents who expressed more interest in a wider and more flexible education for the child which took account of his talents and interests. The latter group saw the need for a broader education with less emphasis on academic potential and more emphasis on other aspects of education such as music, drama, art and physical education. Some of the parents, because of their privileged social position and resources were able to meet these other needs of the child using clubs and networks of out-of-school contacts.

The groups generally held a common expectation for the child to remain at school to achieve as many highs as possible, attend higher or further education, build up a portfolio of academic qualifications, expertise and experience which would be useful,

even in difficult times — basically a bank of school qualifications, knowledge and understanding.

Social Context — Community Characteristics

The groups acknowledged that they lived in a privileged community which allowed them a choice of lifestyles.

“A danger in Area B is that it is easy to have a good life and that every one can have that without knowing that you have to work for it.”

(Parent from Area B)

The groups knew that other areas of Aberdeenshire were less fortunate but the view was expressed that at the core of these communities was a lack of vision and will to expand their horizons. They suggested that there was a minority group like that in their area but that it was not significant in scale.

“A lot of people in B underachieve as school is not cool.”

(Parents in Area B)

Parents and School Relationship

The groups from Area B were very conscious of the contribution of the relationships between the parent and child and between the school and the child. The primary teachers in Area B discussed the role of parents suggesting that the parents had to remember that they were responsible for their children until they were 16 and that beyond loving and caring for them had to set standards and values for the family.

"It is very important to have family rules. It doesn't matter what other families do. If you are part of this family you do this. It is difficult to stand up to them when they are 15/16 but it has to be said no this is the way we do it here."

(Teacher from Area B)

Discussing the relationship between the school and the child, a real partnership between the home and the school was seen as critical by parents.

"We know the child. We know the processes that he must go through to achieve. The school only sees him part of the time. We need to work together for the best possible outcomes."

(Parent in Area B)

4.5.2.6 A Discourse Analysis

A further analysis of the data was effected through discourse analysis (Wetherell et al., 2001) to provide an alternative understanding of the ways in which the participants understood and interpreted concepts of potential, its achievement and the factors affecting it. Interpretative repertoires, 'lived' ideologies and subject positions were used to make sense of the focus group data in order to provide a basis for shared understanding. A number of interpretative repertoires emerged from the findings which illuminated the understandings, actions and interactions of the participants.

Six key themes were identified through the analysis that suggested the frameworks of interpretation, which were informing the thinking, and discourses of the participants. These are presented in table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Interpretative Repertoires

| | |
|---|---|
| • | The purposes of education |
| • | The nature of the school system |
| • | Community characteristics and relationships |
| • | The role of parents |
| • | The concept of identity |
| • | The locus of power. |

4.5.2.7 The Educational Context

Two themes emerged from the analysis relating to the educational contexts: the purposes of education and the nature of the school system.

The Purposes of Education

Table 4.12 Interpretative Repertoire – the Purpose of Education

| |
|---|
| Education is a once in a lifetime opportunity. |
| Education allows the opportunity to bank knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes for life. |
| Education is a lifelong process. |
| Education is irrelevant for one’s future life. |
| Education is about academic success. |
| Education is about nurturing the whole child. |
| Education is needed to get a job. |
| Education is different from learning the job. |
| Education presents opportunities to meet other people, have new experiences, travel the world, and appreciate other people’s points of views, other lives and lifestyles. |
| Education is centred on children’s talents and capabilities and values children for who they are. |

| |
|--|
| Education is a good general education. |
| Education should be as broad as possible. |
| Education is about a sense of worth, happiness, contentment, channelled by the parents and the school. |
| Education is acquiring as many 'bits of paper' as possible. |
| Education has a responsibility to the communities it serves. |
| The Government sets the purpose of education. At present there is a push for academic attainment. |

Although values and attitudes to education were seen as important for promoting potential, the analysis revealed that underlying these was a range of views on the purposes of education (Table 4.12) within which there were many dissonances – for example between the perception of education as a lifelong enterprise and education as a time-limited school experience; between the acquisition of valued academic knowledge and the promotion of self esteem and personal growth for each individual; between the need for academic standards to be evidenced and the flourishing and nurturing of a well rounded individual.

“Potential is not about academics only, it is about a sense of worth, happiness, contentment, channelled by the parents and the school.”

When education was construed as being based on a philosophy of nurturing the whole child, valuing the children for who they are and with the aim centred on fostering children's talents and capabilities, the conflict with a system focussed on raising attainment was acknowledged.

In addition, the concept of education as primarily achieving academic success was in conflict with both the aim of the promotion of self-esteem in young people, and the offering of appropriate education to those who were not academically inclined.

“It is necessary to have a broad base for education. My youngest son is not as academic as his brothers. He got into a trade and is doing really well so there’s ways of getting round it. Potential seems to be measured in academic terms. I don’t think trades are valued at all.”

Additional differences were rooted in views about the timescale of what education in school was for: was it a short term dash to get ‘bits of paper’ to trade for advantage; or a training for a job; or building a sound foundation of skills and knowledge to be built on later in a longer educational journey lasting through life?

“My mother in law says that you have to start on the shop floor, work hard every hour of the day, gain experience in all sections of the business, education is of no use. You tell me why you’ll get a better living with education.”

“I think education allows you to meet people from other walks of life, have other experiences, travel the world, appreciate other people’s points of view, other people’s lives and lifestyles.”

The Nature of the School System

The nature of the present school system emerged from the analysis as a key factor relevant for the achievement of learning potential and again, diverse underlying ideas informed the views of the respondents. The repertoires included perceptions of the system as one which should be re-designed to respond to more diverse needs of individuals and/or the communities in which they were located; as an acceptable system

which should be adapted to by diverse groups; and as a system in which the shortcomings were barriers to educational achievement (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13 Interpretative Repertoire – the Nature of the School System

| |
|---|
| The school system is a middle class system with middle class values. |
| Children from sociological backgrounds other than middle class must conform to a system outwith their cultural norms. |
| The school system does not cater for all. |
| Differences in abilities, differences in aptitudes, differences in attitudes to education in one classroom causes difficulties. |
| The pupils need to learn to fit in to the system. |
| The system needs to change to respond more realistically to the needs of pupils and community |
| Secondary schools and primary schools are different. Secondary schools do not have the personal touch. Primary schools look out for the children and care what happens. |
| Secondary schools teach subjects. Primary schools teach children. |
| Class sizes affect the ability to be responsive to differences and deal with problems. |
| Requirements for attainment targets cause educational difficulties. |
| The school system is not challenging enough. |
| The school system does not offer the range of subjects previously available for the non-academic. |
| The school system no longer offers experiences relevant for work. |
| The school system has become more and more focused on the academic subjects. |

The views on the nature and effectiveness of the system reflected in part the differences identified above in ideas about the purpose of education, for example primary education was identified as being more responsive than secondary to children as individuals and to fostering personal development and non-academic aims and goals.

“We really look after our children in primary school.”

The diverse range of pupil needs and characteristics which had to be responded to were reflected in concerns about the size of the classes, the level of challenge, and the lack of vocational experiences.

“The primary teacher has 30 pupils and I have 180 pupils in secondary per week.”

“Children with behavioural problems are parachuted in with no resources. The problems seriously affect the progress of other kids but also the emotional sanity of the other kids.”

“The problem for subject teachers is when you have to achieve unrealistic attainment levels or when you are expected to put in an unrealistic individualized teaching when you have 29 other pupils – very demanding.”

The aspirations of the government that everyone who is able to should aim to go to university, and central directives and pressure to raise attainment as evidenced through exam results, were perceived as negative influences on many desirable educational activities, and as causing stress within the systems as presently organised. With an emphasis on attainment increasingly evident in primary schools, passing target levels at an earlier age was now seen as an imposed priority, with the requirement that as many pupils as possible should attain the national average and beyond regardless of the needs and characteristics of the pupils. In the secondary schools measures were in place to raise the number of exam passes at standard grade, higher grade and advanced higher. Some respondents felt that teachers were being given unrealistic attainment targets causing both teachers and pupils undue stress.

“Comes from the government – push, push, push everyone to uni.”

“I don’t think trades are valued at all.”

Even the subjects which suited the less able academically now had incorporated theory with exams and assessments which pupils had to pass to move onto further education. When parents spoke to teachers about education they said that it was inevitably about academic matters and concerns were expressed about the neglect of the vocational and aesthetic subjects. They also highlighted the need for vocational education opportunities and work experience aspects which they believed were no longer given priority.

“Has anyone ever looked at the initiatives we use to see how good they are?”

“Work experience – they love it, no matter how menial the task. It is an eye-opener for them. Now we don’t have work experience.”

“But we had a kid at Gray Adams. He came back after 2 hours as sweeping the floor was beneath him.”

The exam system route was considered acceptable for those who were able, who were well supported and who were motivated to conform to the system. For the others, school experience and demands led to disaffection and disappointment. While there was recognition given to the large number of children who were not able to or who couldn’t conform to the system, there was no consensus on how schools should respond. Should the children be forced to change or should the system be changed to better meet their requirements?

“What comes out of it is that children are expected to fit into the system rather than the system working round about them.”

“We look at the timetables to make him more comfortable in the school. Should we change to suit him or should he change to suit us? We have had him since he was five years old. We need to change to suit him.”

The general consensus was that the system did not show enough flexibility to meet the educational need of many pupils. The extent to which this was perceived as something which schools should act to change varied.

“With the mother’s own education and her marital status you can’t expect her to nurture him in the middle class ways of the education system.”

Clearly overall there was little consensus on the purposes of education which informed the thinking and actions of those in the focus groups. The range of views appeared to be derived from reflection on personal experience, professional philosophy, practice and policies, and life experiences. The government agenda of attainment targets and increases in the university entrance were seen to be creating difficulties for many in the system, but since there was no shared view on the central purposes of education, there was no consensus on how the system might be changed to be more responsive to the range of pupils in their care.

4.5.2.8 Social Contexts

Two themes emerged from the analysis relating to the social contexts: the community characteristics and the role of parents.

Community Characteristics

When talking about ‘community’ all groups identified this as the traditional community located in local geographical areas and identified themselves as belonging or not belonging to this. Those who did not belong identified with communities of interests or communities of relationships some of which existed in the non-geographical ‘global’ professions such as those in the oil and gas industry. The power of the community influence comprising a network of family and community forces featured in the discourses. Different views were held on the value of the qualities of the old well established communities in which the schools were embedded (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14 Interpretative Repertoire – Community Characteristics and Relationships

| |
|---|
| People in the North East lack vision to do anything different from their tradition. |
| The communities have a good infrastructure with traditional industries. |
| People need not leave the community to have a good living. |
| People feel steady jobs in the community are important. |
| The political and economic position of communities is changing fast. |
| It is often the second generation that moves, they make the first breaks in the traditional pattern, they go for education and return to the community. |
| Education has a responsibility to the communities it serves. |
| Communities have strong interpersonal supportive networks. |

The old established and traditional communities were seen as exerting forces inhibiting progress and putting limitations on educational achievement and wider ambitions. It was considered necessary to have a strong character to be able to escape community restraints on personal achievement by departing from the area or from family norms.

“In the north east of Scotland there is the concept of duty especially in the farming industry. Elements of duty are carrying on the family business. You are disloyal if you don’t.”

The traditional communities were seen by some to be lacking in vision. The fact that folk were born, brought up and worked in their original community, and were content to do so even although there were opportunities to do other things, particularly through gaining education or training was seen as a form of failure by those in the more prosperous, and mobile community:

“The people on the coast lack vision to do anything different. All they want is a steady job so why would they risk anything demanding such as a college course.”

For some professions, for example teachers, there had been the satisfaction of a compromise. They had moved from their community to go to university only to return to their own area to teach, or join a similar profession, thus avoiding engagement with the traditional industries while retaining the comfort of remaining within their own traditions and culture.

“When I worked in Area P, I looked at the Dux Board to find that most of the names were now teachers in the school. It doesn’t happen so much now.”

Their children had become the generation who went to university and subsequently moved on into the wider world.

“My daughter has a first from Glasgow, has done her Masters and now works in the City. There is nothing for her here.”

There was a consensus that apart from a minority in social or public services such as the teaching profession, those who did not taken advantage of the education system tended to remain in their local community within a recurring cycle of limited employment prospects.

However, the findings revealed concerns that the work environment was changing and the jobs available to those who had left school early were drying up. The fishing industry like other heavy industry had completely wound down with the decommissioning of boats, and the fish processing units presently using imported fish did not have a future. Farming was seen as likely to be a part time job in the future with experiences in New Zealand cited as an example. There was a view that those who valued education saw education and a good set of exam results as the only way to the future in the light of the changing economic, social and political environment.

“We have a fund set up for the children to go to university. If they want to go away I wouldn’t stop them for there is nothing around here.”

There was a view among most respondents that the traditional community was a place to be escaped from rather than invested in, and education was the means to do this.

“The escape hatch has to be to get as good an education as possible and bits of paper and open up different scenarios. Kids of the future will not have one job for life like we did, they will have several.”

The Role of Parents

The views which emerged on the role of the parents were complex. They were seen as intermediaries between the community and the school, and between the child and the school, but frequently they brought their own distinctive personal agenda depending on factors such as their individual character, ambitions and past educational experiences.

(Table 4.15)

Table 4.15 Interpretative Repertoire – the Role of Parents

| |
|---|
| The family must take charge of the young people until they are 16. They must be authoritarian when necessary. |
| Parents must show by example. |
| Parent must teach their children to think for themselves and take responsibility. |
| Good parenting is more than feeding, cleaning and providing for the child. |
| Good parenting is communicating with the child. |
| Good parenting is committing time to the child. |
| Good parenting is leading and managing the child. |
| Parents must put in place family rules and boundaries. |
| It is easier when the father is on the scene as well as the mother. Other adults are also responsible. |

The qualities of good parenting were identified and the attitudes and support required from parents, all of which were important for the achievement of potential.

“Remember the boy in Fiona’s class. When he changed his family he changed his views about education. Nothing we could have done in school would have changed that for him so it is a mixture of the supports that need to be in place. When he was with his own family he was out on the streets and in trouble. Now he is with a family who views education positively and he

goes to the museum, is learning to play a brass instrument, visits the library. It is all to do with parental values and attitudes. He can now see that the end is not the fish factory or the dole. He is talking about being a doctor, a couple of years ago that would not have entered his head.”

“Family rules are very important. It doesn’t matter what other families do. If you are part of this family you must do this. It is difficult to stand up to them when they are 15/16 but no... this is how we do it here, we expect this. Eventually they click.”

“I love it when parents of 11 year olds say that they can’t get their children to do things. Get a life, they are the parents and they have responsibilities.”

Parents felt they could only achieve a certain amount, some negotiation with the child was necessary. If young people abandoned education before taking standard grades or highs then the mountain was steep and the young person had to have significant motivation to set out again on a journey of education.

“It isn’t what the parent wants it is what the child will do. You can only push so far. You cannot impose what you want. What they do after school is really their decision but if they haven’t passed their exams at school it really is tough. One really has to make a deal with the child.”

Parents saw themselves as mediators and negotiators between the child and the school. Those parents who were themselves educated and had had positive experiences within the education system were regarded as seeing the value of education for their children. They were considered to have focused, realistic but sometimes unrealistic expectations of their children and the system.

“Parents have a strong expectation of their children to get the best grades, go to the correct university, the best degree.”

The system was there to be taken advantage of but where it failed these parents had alternative ways of dealing with the shortfalls. Some parents had specialist resources and networks to assist them to ease barriers in their child's progress. For them it was considered easy to identify with the strengths and weaknesses of the system and to manage the attainment of their goals within it.

“We have our network of friends who will advise our children when there is a problem.”

“I would use bribery and corruption to turn my child around. I would visit other schools, ask him if he wanted to learn at home. But then I am a parent who knows of the effect of education. Some parents haven't been through it and don't see its value.”

There was recognition that parents who had not experienced the advantages of the system themselves did not necessarily see the value for their children. If their children did well and were keen, they supported them. If they didn't then they were content for them take a job at the chicken factory or the fish processing as others were seen to do well enough there, and it was better than other futures which some had unfortunately fallen into:

“It is a class thing – low confidence to do with the mother and the grandparents. They are not confident in their child and do not invest the time in him. It may not be a formal decision but subconsciously. It is as far as the school is concerned. I am sure he is very well looked after, loved and cared for but as far as school is concerned the time investment hasn't been put in.”

The educational support of parents was seen as a key factor in determining outcomes.

“I have seen it where very able children with no support from parents are compared to middle of the road children with normal support and the latter do as well if not better than the former. I shall support my children to achieve their potential.”

Overall there was consensus in the focus groups that the economic and political changes would affect those born and brought up in the traditional communities. There was a perceived view that there was a mismatch in their vision of lifestyles and that of the education service. It was acknowledged that there was movement but the changes were seen to be at best generational. Many said this should change. Key to any change was seen to be the role and responsibilities of the parents and their relationship with their children and with the school system.

4.5.2.9 Roles and Relationships

Throughout, relationships emerged as important in the achievement of potential. The relationships were among teachers, parents and children, with each of these groups evidencing a range of different identities in their interactions.

Table 4.16 Interpretative Repertoire - Identities

| |
|---|
| The teacher is a professional |
| The teacher is autonomous |
| The teacher is a mediator |
| The teacher is a subject specialist |
| The teacher provides guidance |
| The teacher is a carer, supporter, mentor |
| The teacher is an adult in the community |
| The teacher is employed to do a job |
| The teacher is accountable to the employer |
| The parent is part of a mobile professional community |
| The parent is part of the traditional community |
| The parent is a carer and nurturer |
| The parent is an educator and teacher |
| The child is a replication of the family |
| The child has a duty to the family |
| The child follows the aspirations of peer group |
| The child takes the opportunity of education and returns to the community |
| The child moves away from the community |

4.5.2.10 The Teacher

The teacher was seen to be a professional, someone who is qualified and trained in his field and has the knowledge and understanding of the theories of learning, teaching and the curriculum. Within this professional identity, the teacher was regarded as someone who should have autonomy in the classroom because of qualifications and training, learning and teaching strategies, knowledge of the children and an ability for mediation and meeting children's needs. The teacher had the children for only a limited period,

however, and could not know everything about them, so their role was limited by this. Some teachers were seen as clever and knowledgeable about their subject but as limited in their teaching skills.

“Teaching is their job. They know best. I would not interfere.”

“I hope the teacher knows better than me.”

“Teachers see the product but may not see the process. It is hard for the teacher to know what is going on all the time.”

“Some teachers are clever but they can’t teach.”

The contrasting identities of the secondary and primary teachers, characterised as the subject specialist versus the generalist and mentor emerged as an explanation when children who had done well in primary school failed to progress in the secondary and from time to time when a child blossomed when he went to secondary school. Many secondary teachers saw their vocation as teaching their specialist subject, with others, the guidance teachers, employed to care, support and guide. In contrast the primary teachers had a multi-tasking role as a generic teacher, mentor, and supporter.

“Primary schools have one teacher per thirty children, secondary teachers have up to 200 children each week.”

“At 20 past 3, he is someone else’s problem.”

“Children choose subjects because of the teacher.”

“They see their guidance teacher once a week.”

“The guidance teacher would be well aware of the background and would know if useful interventions could be made.”

In addition to their role in teaching children, teachers were also identified as employees who had to engage with the aims and objectives of the education system particularly the raising of attainment and inclusion for all.

“Teachers are there to do a job.”

The identity of the teacher included roles in the community: a leader in the community, a community councillor, an office bearer on committees as well as the person who lives next door. As adults in the community, teachers were seen to make valued contributions.

“Adults impact young minds. They don’t take it seriously enough.”

“All teachers put something into the community. What is the business about — making a bigger salary or going on and doing good? Nobody who does their best regrets it.”

4.5.2.11 The Parents

Two important parental identities emerged: that of a mobile parent who was part of a global professional community and that of the traditional community parent embedded in the local geographical context. Negative attitudes were expressed by those in the former group towards the traditional community values and towards the traditions and lifestyles of the area. Education was seen as a route towards a better future. Changes in the economic and political contexts were critiqued and external intervention was offered as a solution to the management of changes.

Two distinct roles emerged with respect to the parents as nurturers and as educators. Parents could be effective in one role, and neglectful in the other:

“Most people don’t achieve because there isn’t the parental encouragement to achieve academically.”

“It is parental influence that drives a child to go to university.”

“There are those who want their kids to do better than them, and those who say it was good enough for me so it will be good enough for them.”

“Where there are a lot of middle class people they have expectations of university. A lot of people who have always been here are not particularly ambitious.”

Parents in sections of the community were seen to require support from professional agencies in the skills of caring and nurturing their children.

“Parents need to be taught to be parents at an early age.”

“How can we change the environment? An awful lot of what is happening is due to the family situation, aspirations, and what he is encouraged to do.”

“It’s parents. We need to be taught at an early stage to be parents.”

“His mother and him should have had the help at an earlier age.”

Changes in family composition in the traditional community was also seen to be a key influence on the children, particularly with respect to the important role of the father and the former role of grandparents.

“It makes a difference if the father is on the scene.”

“Dad can come in and tell them and they will do it. Mum can come in and they will argue.”

“We lack the extended family now. The grandparents are out working now and not about so much. They have their own life now.”

“Grandparents do their own thing now and don’t cover to let the family out to work. Before they didn’t work.”

Individuals who had a dual identity as parent and teacher were seen to be in a privileged position with regard to their own children. They were seen to be familiar with the system and have networks of colleagues to support and mentor.

“If you are a teacher you are in the know.”

4.5.2.12 The Child

The emerging identities of the young people were seen to be influenced by a range of features in the home and community and in the educational context. It was considered that children would create their own identity through replication within the present family situation if there was no intervention by the school or other agencies.

“This mother said to the kiddie in the post office – this is where you come for your pennies when you grow up.”

“Where I was brought up there was a good infrastructure with the woollen mills. I went to university but many of my friends are still there and it will be the same in 30 years.”

“My quinnie is 12 with a head of 17. She just hates school. What is her life going to be like when she’s 15? If you can’t get into the fish factory, what else is there – drugs, drink, get pregnant.”

The duty of the child to the traditions of the family was seen as strong and a cause of conflict. The child in the past had been expected to follow in the footsteps of the parent to the fishing boat, the farm, or the family business. In education it was seen to be important to go to the same university as one's parents, and to get at least the same level of degree and better if possible. 'Good' families were expected to have rules and boundaries in place for children at least until the age of 16.

"Never underestimate the power of the family. The heritage and traditions are very powerful. I have seen it before in my family history."

"In the north east of Scotland there is the concept of duty especially in the farming industry. Elements of duty are carrying on the family business. You are disloyal if you don't."

"It is very important to have family rules. 'If you are part of this family you do this'. It is difficult to stand up to them when they are 15/16 but it has to be said – 'no this is the way we do it here'."

Identifying with the peer group was seen as both a positive and negative aspect of identity formation. When friends were high achievers then children were motivated to work hard at school and achieve well. Others identified with those who did not find it 'cool' to work hard at school.

"They say, 'I'm as able as he or she so I'll try to do as well as them.'"

"The group that find it cool to gather down the road at corners are always a key influence."

It was possible for some to take advantage of education to manage two separate identities — the half way house where the individual takes the opportunity of education and returns to the community. Others moved out and away from the community. Neither was seen as a new phenomenon but they were both seen as an improvement compared with immobility and working within the traditional patterns.

“When I worked in P, I looked at the Dux Board to find that most of the names were now teachers in the school. It doesn’t happen so much now.”

“My granny was out of school at 12 to help on the farm as her father and two brothers were killed in the First World War. That was it. At 17 she went to Edinburgh and never came back.”

The Locus of Power

The concept of a power struggle in the relationship between home and school emerged in the reported perceptions of the ‘other’ group. (see Table 4.15)

Table 4.17 Interpretative Repertoire – the Locus of Power

| |
|---|
| There is a tug of war between the home/community and the school system. |
| The school has the child x hours and the home has the child x hours. |
| Teachers see the child for short periods of time and cannot be expected to influence the child. |
| Teachers react to issues by placing barriers to maintain control. |
| Teachers use strategies such as withholding information, patronisation, and assertion. |
| Parents react to issues with aggression. |
| Parents react by refusing or ignoring requests to contact the school. |
| Parents react by using formal and informal networks to gain the upper hand. |
| Parents best know their child and the processes he uses to learn. |
| Parents perceive that teachers think they know best. |
| Parents believe that they have much to offer the school system. |

Teachers enacting their professional roles were seen by parents to be in a position of control, leaving them in a weak position regarding decisions or views on the curriculum and learning and teaching. Teachers were seen to use professional attributes to maintain the position of control. They were considered to divulge only the information that they wished to share, place barriers between themselves and the parents and talk down to parents rather than discuss issues. Parents described it as a ‘notion of patronisation’.

Parents in this situation felt forced to adopt assertiveness to get action.

‘My son was a nightmare in 1st and 2nd year. I was never out of the school whether that was right or wrong. You can’t go through the primary being a happy child then change. After one week at the secondary there were tears. You just couldn’t let it pass. A lot of folk would just let it pass. It depends on yourself. You know your kids and you ken the life at home. The staff can be intimidating but you have to stick to your guns if it is

something you believe in. I stuck in at it until I got answers. We ken't right awa something was wrong. The guidance told me my loon was a big loon and he could look after himself. I told him that it did not matter how big he was he was only 12 and the 4th and 5th years were bullying him.'

'The first week my child was bullied I went to the guidance teacher. My quinnie was being bullied, she retaliated and I got a letter home to say that if she did it again she would be excluded. It is one rule for one and another rule for others.'

Teachers recognised the attitude of assertiveness from parents although they termed it 'aggression'. They described how parents used intimidating behaviour and threats to get their way leaving the teachers in a weak and often vulnerable position.

Parents saw themselves as having potential for a real partnership, working together with teachers for the promotion of their child's potential. They felt they knew their children and how they operated better than the teacher, yet their views and opinions were not necessarily taken on board. Parents found it hard to break into the system, perceiving the teachers as closing ranks.

"Teachers see the product but may not see the process and the process shows that it may not have been easy or straight forward. It is hard for the class teacher to know what is going on all the time. We had a difficult time and the teachers said there was no problem."

"I asked my 12 year old what potential was. He knew. I asked him if the teachers would know what his potential was and he said that they couldn't because they did not know him well enough."

“Teachers have him so many hours in school. They can modify behaviour to an extent. At 20 past 3 it is someone else’s problem. Depending on the background it is an action replay of his mother.”

“It has to be a partnership, the parents who know the child, the best information from careers. The school can’t know pupils very well because it is a numbers game.”

4.6 Conclusion

The results provide two contexts within which factors contributed to the achievement of learning potential: an educational context and a social context, interacting to determine the complex social setting within which the individual child’s potential is developed. The adult players in these contexts, the teachers and the parents adopt a variety of roles and exercise power over each other, frequently generating conflict, while professing a yearning for a real partnership to pursue their common goals in shaping the emerging identity and the successful development of the child.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The initial stages of this study suggested that the conditions for the achievement of potential would be focussed on factors associated mainly with the classroom and the schools. However, as the work progressed, it was necessary to extend the concerns of the study.

The literature revealed that the concept of ‘achieving potential’ had a long and complex past, and had been considered within the frameworks of philosophy, religion and psychology as well as education where it had recently entered the language of policy documents and school aims. The exploration of the understanding of potential and what achieving it meant showed that its current meanings were also complex and the conditions considered relevant for achievement reached far beyond the classroom walls.

In this final chapter, the findings from the literature review and the empirical work are discussed with respect to four main research purposes: (1) to explore the meaning of potential; (2) to consider the factors affecting potential; (3) to consider the conditions conducive for the achievement of potential; and (4) to consider the indicators developed and to reflect on their implications for policy and practice.

The research questions addressed in the study relevant to the four areas of research concern were:

Research purpose one: exploring the concept of potential.

- In what ways did the literature assist in the development of a concept of potential?
- What is the meaning of potential from the perspective of the different groups involved in the study?
- What is the meaning of potential in the context of the Scottish education system?

Research purposes two and three: exploring the understanding of the key factors influencing potential and the conditions conducive for its achievement.

- What are the key factors that participants in the study regard as having an influence on the potential of the children and young people?
- What conditions are seen as conducive to the attainment of potential for the children and young people in the study area?

Research purpose four: reflecting on the implications for educational policy and practice.

- What are the implications for the planning of policy and practice in Scottish schools?

5.2 The Concept of Potential

This section discusses the concept of potential, its complexity and its place in the education system.

5.2.1 The Literature

The literature assisted in developing understanding of the meaning of the word potential. The literature highlighted three concepts of potential, which varied considerably in the extent to which the potential of an individual is considered to be limited by birth or genes, equal but limited by circumstances, or unlimited. The literature review (Section 2.2) considered a variety of approaches from throughout history and revealed a complexity of ideas, views, perceptions and concepts. The problem, however, was that the understanding of potential that appeared in the literature was diverse, and this diversity did not lend itself to the understanding of potential as a single coherent concept. Overall the concept of potential emerged as extremely complex. Its principal components were determined by the social and disciplinary frameworks –philosophical, psychological, educational – within which different authors were writing. Edley and Wetherell, (1996) and Edley (Wetherell et al., 2001, pp. 191–192) described masculinity as discourse. When the discussion had the word masculinity replaced by the word potential the result went a long way towards summing up the findings throughout this study both in the field and in the literature. It said:

"(Potential) is neither something into which we are born nor something that we eventually become. It could be described as 'a jelly that never sets'. People's (potential) remains relatively fluid capable of adapting to the particular social settings or contexts in which people find themselves. It is something done or accomplished in the course of social interactions. (Potential) is seen as a consequence rather than a cause of such activities drawing from one's cultural history."

Based on Edley (Wetherell et al., 2001, pp.191-192)

5.2.2 The Complex Concept of Potential

Each aspect of the quote (Section 5.2.1) is discussed using findings from the fieldwork particularly Tables 4.1, Table 4.5, Section 4.3.2, Section 4.4.2.1 and Appendix 5.

5.2.2.1 Potential is Something One is Born with.

Potential was seen to be the maximisation of the individual's capabilities or what they are able to do even although they might not have evidence to prove it. For some people it was simply academic ability. For others the qualities were seen as more complex – a mixture of a person's cognitive ability, aptitude and personality. Children were seen to be achieving their potential if they were happy doing what they were interested in and 'successful at their own level'. The results showed that potential was seen as something closely related to 'nature' – the characteristics the child was born with, their innate characteristics, intellectual abilities and propensities.

5.2.2.2 Potential is Something One Becomes.

Potential was considered to be an inner thing to be pulled out (Table 4.1). It was also seen as the pushing out of boundaries to a new way of living beyond the present position, but achievable. More than one person saw potential as an escalator where the individual took one step at a time towards a final goal. The results showed that for some potential was seen as something we eventually become or achieve, a destination at the end of a process.

5.2.2.3 Potential is like a ‘Jelly That Never Sets’.

Participants expressed potential as a lifetime objective, something never quite finalised. Given their natural abilities and aptitudes the direction of development is dependent on the context the individual is in. Potential was conceived as something, which may or may not be fulfilled. Some argued that one achieved potential by keeping an even profile with few peaks and troughs (Section 4.3.2) while others saw it as the pushing out of boundaries if/when opportunities arose. Some agreed that it was gained from the wisdom of others. The results showed that potential was seen as something that can move and change throughout life. It was never possible to say when it had been achieved or whether a destination had finally been arrived at, or in which specific direction development should go.

5.2.2.4 People’s Potential Remains Relatively Fluid, Capable of Adapting to the Particular Social Settings or Contexts in Which People Find Themselves.

Respondents presented a number of examples where the potential of individuals changed because of changes in a social setting. There was the boy who moved from his

own family in the town to a foster family. This new home context changed his outlook and his expectations of himself significantly (Section 4.5.2.8). Participants commented on the moves from one educational context to another, particularly primary to secondary school, associated with changes in expectations sometimes positive and sometimes negative (Section 4.5.4.2). The results showed that potential can be limited or extended by the particular immediate social settings or contexts in which the children find themselves.

5.2.2.5 It is Something Done or Accomplished in the Course of Personal Interactions.

Many participants expressed a view that interactions with particular individuals had accelerated and motivated their development, for example, a change in teacher changed their outlook in a subject and consequently their potential to achieve. This influence was also identified in other contexts — the Boys Brigade Leader (Section 4.3.2.2), the dancing teacher, a special friend (Section 2.4.2.4). The charismatic, responsive teacher was identified frequently in the study as the key person in the process of children achieving their potential in the formal education system (Section 4.3.4.2). The results showed potential can be achieved in the course of or as a result of specific interpersonal interactions.

5.2.2.6 Potential is seen as a Consequence Rather than a Cause of Activities drawn from One's Cultural History.

Many examples of the concept of potential being embedded within cultural history were presented in the results. Values placed on education by communities reflected their cultural traditions and lifestyle (Section 4.5.2.8). Those people from fishing communities saw little need for paper qualifications as the learning they valued took

place on the job, and achieving potential did not depend on formal educational success (Section 4.5.4.7). However, those who had successfully passed through the education system saw the potential of their children as being closely associated with and defined by the formal educational system (Section 4.5.2.8). Working class children's culture was seen to have adverse consequences within a middle class education system (Section 4.5.4.2). The results showed potential can be defined by activities and values drawn from one's cultural history.

5.2.2.7 Conclusion

Using Edley's quotation (Wetherell et al., 2001, pp.191–192) substituting 'masculinity' with 'potential' drew together the author's findings on potential. The key points which emerged were as follows:

- Everyone is born with potential.
- Everyone achieves some potential.
- Individuals' potential can change throughout their lives because of:
 - social context,
 - personal relationships, and
 - cultural factors.

5.2.3 The Concept of Potential: Its Place in the Educational System.

In this section the place of the concept of potential is discussed within educational literature and policy documents and within the educational system

5.2.3.1 The Concept within Educational Literature and Policy Documents

'Teaching for Effective Learning' (SCCC, 1996) was one of the first widely distributed publications to suggest that young people had much greater potential for learning than is commonly recognised, and that schools and individual teachers could dramatically influence the extent, the quality and the attitudes towards learning in later life. Bailey and Bridges (1983) were of a similar view. Fisher (1995) said all children were born with potential but he was not sure of the learning limits to children's performance. Daunt (1978) suggested that the assessment of potential was difficult but not impossible. Portsmouth & Casswell (1988) said achieving potential was a myth as there were no fixed limits and Deale (1977) said there was no useful way of assessing potential or even defining it with regard to an individual child. As outlined in section 2.5, the 'Standards in Scotland's Schools Act etc. 2000' put the theme of achieving potential within the school system into a legal framework. Education Authorities now have service plans linked to the national priorities with additional local improvement objectives; schools have development plans linked to national priorities and local improvement objectives as well as their own local objectives. It is now common to see in almost all schools the following type of statement:

"Our main aim is to improve, continually, the quality of learning opportunities for each pupil in all areas of the curriculum to allow everyone to develop to their full potential."

(Primary School, 2003)

5.2.3.2 The Concept of Potential within the Educational System

With the new concept, that of potential, (Scottish Parliament, 2000) added to the regular vocabulary of educators it might have been expected that this was a simple substitute for the concept of intelligence, which had dominated the school system for the past seventy years. This concept had determined the key structures and procedures of the educational system for most of the 20th century. Intelligence (Section 2.2.3) was hypothesised as an inborn, immutable and unalterable characteristic of every child, tests were developed to measure it, and serious educational consequences followed the test results. Even when intelligence testing lapsed, primarily as a result of the introduction of comprehensive secondary schools, teachers' vocabulary evidenced that the idea lived on in their thoughts and consequently in their perceptions, expectations and actions in the classrooms – children were described as bright, brainy, quick on the uptake, clever, sharp, fast learners, irrespective of the educational setting.

However, participants in the study gave rich and thick descriptions of potential. The descriptions that they used showed their recognition that people are unique human beings with abilities, aptitudes and attitudes in a variety of fields – physical, mental, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual (Table 4.1). They recognised the concept to be that of people maximising the development and use of a range of capabilities. Children achieving their potential were seen by some as people with an even profile with few peaks and troughs, with a good focus and in control of their learning, by others in a staged approach rather like the steps on an escalator, and by a few as grabbing the opportunities that come along and using them to optimise development.

Potential is thus widely understood to be very complex but the stated aim is to embed it as an achievement to be enabled for every child in the delivery of Scottish education. In an attempt to enable and encourage the achievement of this aspiration, the National Debate of 2002 produced a theme entitled *Educating for Excellence*, in which a set of priorities were set out (Section 2.5) and subsequent papers have expanded on advice on the curriculum, and on additional support and inclusion.

In the following sections, the data derived from the study are used to explore the ideal conditions in which potential is likely to be achieved, and contrasts this with the system currently in place.

5.3 The Factors influencing Potential and the Conditions conducive for its Achievement.

This section considers the key features of an evolving educational system, the possibility of achieving potential within current policy aspirations, and the barriers preventing the achievement of potential. It then considers key roles and relationships necessary to achieve potential.

5.3.1 The Historic Basis of Key Features of the Evolving Educational System

In Scotland, until the early 1970s, the qualifying exam at the end of primary schooling decided the child's pathway through secondary schooling (Bryce & Humes, 1999). Because it was based on the concept of fixed intelligence and its accurate measurement, the system was designed around the sorting of children according to the quantity of

intelligence they were born with. It was considered that this quantity could not be altered, and from its measurement, the destination of the children both in terms of the education suitable for them and their destination in future occupations was confidently predicted. At 11 years of age the results of this set of exams undertaken on a few days in the spring of primary seven provided the child with a label: two language academic, one language with commercial, technical or home economics, academic non language, or non academic. In some locations, usually in urban areas, these courses were delivered in different schools, in rural areas they would be delivered within the same school. Whether the children knew the meaning of their label or not, they recognised that there was a hierarchy of levels and their place in that hierarchy was determined by others at one point in time. Although it was technically possible to cross from one pathway to another this was the exception rather than the rule.

Pupils in the highest stream could look forward to a pure academic course leading to 'O' grades and 'H' grades with the aim of admission to university or a college of higher education; pupils taking the vocational courses had a pathway to further education colleges such as the domestic science school or the commercial college. The remainder were destined for apprenticeships and the jobs, which were regarded as appropriate for those unable to engage successfully with the academic curriculum and the pace of its delivery.

Within the school system the most senior and highly qualified staff were timetabled to teach the groups of most able pupils. It would have been considered within the school system that this minority group of pupils were the ones who would be able to reach their fullest potential given that intelligence was considered the key factor for attainment.

The school system worked mainly in isolation from the parent body, with their involvement limited to occasional meetings convened to pass on information to parents and solicit the parents' and pupils' compliance with school requirements. Key people, such as business owners and managers in the local community, were largely ignored regardless of the fact that they would have significant influence on the future lives of the majority who would remain in the community taking up apprenticeships and working in factories, service industries and so on.

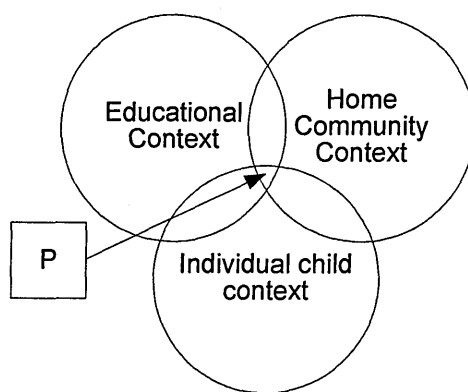
5.3.2 Achieving Potential within the Traditional Educational System

Overall, the minority of pupils who were seen to achieve their potential in the traditional system were likely to have potential defined in terms of the school hierarchy and by their level of attainment within the narrow academic curriculum. These pupils would be described as having high intelligence, being inclined towards engagement with academic subjects and able to retain and recall information transmitted to them in groups by subject specialists teaching in a didactic retention and recall style. The school curriculum comprised academic subjects derived from historical concepts of valued academic information and closely geared to the subjects taught and valued in universities – to which less than 10% of the population went in the middle of the 20th century. The exam system was appropriate to the teaching style, with a heavy emphasis on written work and the regurgitation of the knowledge transmitted by teachers. Parents were less encouraged to have communication with schools than occurs in current official discourse, and certainly had little influence on the curriculum, the learning and teaching or the nature of the system. The model below shows the minority of pupils

who were expected to achieve potential (P) as the centre of three interconnecting circles: educational context; home and community context and individual child context; - three circles with little overlap (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Model for the Achievement of Potential

P = the proportion of pupils in a cohort achieving their potential



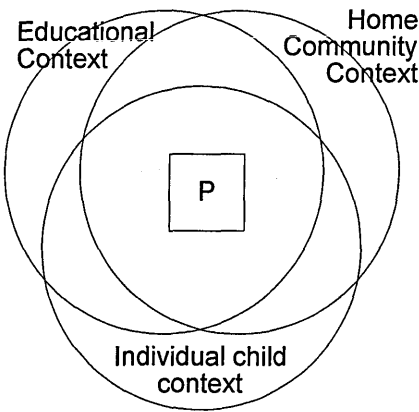
This small proportion of pupils engaged successfully with a system which demanded their engagement with a highly competitive academically oriented educational system. They were likely to come from homes or communities which shared the values of that educational system and which valued its outcomes. The individual pupils had the personal characteristics, which disposed them to be motivated towards engagement with the academic curriculum and acceptance of the school requirements.

5.3.3 Achieving Potential within Current Policy Aspirations

Over the past forty years policy initiatives have been directed towards making the system more responsive to all learners (Section 2.5). The introduction of the comprehensive system and the move from 'O' grades and 'H' grades to Standard Grades

and Higher Still is designed to allow more children achieve qualifications (Simpson, 2006). With the aim in statute (Scottish Parliament, 2000) that all pupils must be enabled to achieve their highest potential (P in Figure 5.2) what would be the ideal context within which a greater proportion of young people could achieve their potential harmoniously and productively within the present school system? The answer is suggested by data from the early rounds of the study (Sections 4.2 & 4.3). The ideal model requires the maximum common ground among all three parties: the individual child, those in the educational context and those in the home-community context in order to maximise the proportion of pupils achieving P as in Figure 5.2. But how could this come about? For children to be successful, these three areas must be in harmony. The children must have the characteristics, which allow them to engage successfully. The formal educational system must recognise these characteristics and offer an appropriate educational context to meet the needs of the individual children. The social context must value both the educational experience provided by the system and the outcomes in terms of qualifications or enhancing experiences.

Figure 5.2: Model for the Achievement of Potential for All



Parents, when describing the achievement of potential indicated that they wanted their children first and foremost to be happy, second to be doing what they are interested in and third to be successful at their own level (Table 4.5). Other characteristics they saw as less important.

Conditions conducive for the achievement of potential had to meet the needs of the whole child: their biological needs – warmth, good diet and plenty sleep, their physical needs – exercise and play and their emotional needs – high self-esteem and well adjusted, all relying on good parenting skills (Figure 4.1). In addition other conditions included interpersonal skills, life skills and communication, which rely on both parenting in the home environment and the school curriculum.

Within the home context the quality of the parenting skills was considered to reflect on the cultural background, and the parents' level of education (Sections 4.4.4.4 & 4.5.4.2). Engaging successfully with the school community was recognised as being easier if the home/community experiences and attitudes were in harmony with those in the school system because parents' views and opinions are frequently adopted by the child. Children settle well, respect school rules and work hard when the parents themselves support school decisions and ally with the requirements of the school (Section 4.3.2.3). Parents who are educated and others who see it as a route to a better lifestyle tend to value education and pass that love of learning to their children edging and easing them towards success (Section 4.5.4.8.). In the top primary school classes and throughout secondary school the peer group was also seen to have a significant influence and this was seen as positive where a child identifies with others who are positive and interested in success at school (Section 4.4.4.2).

Within the educational context differences were recognised between the conditions offered in the primary and secondary sectors which suggested that the primary system was more likely than the secondary system to succeed in providing conditions within which individual needs could be responded to (Section 4.5.4.2). Within the primary school system the personality of the teacher was seen as a key to success, and children flourished if they liked and trusted their teachers and were in return provided with a safe and secure environment. A curriculum, one appropriate to the child's age and stage of development was seen to be essential, taught with enough flexibility to allow the use of their preferred style of learning (Section 4.4.2.3). Overall a teacher who knows the children, their abilities, aptitudes and styles of learning was considered the most important factor (Section 4.3.2.2).

In the secondary school children were recognised as succeeding if they had had the opportunity to choose the correct subjects according to their aptitude and ability and had a teacher who made the best of their strengths and weaknesses in learning styles by using a range of appropriate teaching styles (Section 4.3.2). They were also more likely to succeed if they were able to behave in the structured and controlled environment by adhering to the required behaviour norms and management systems of what is typically a large and complex organisation (Figure 4.4).

However, as outlined in the section 5.3.4, this study found that the reality for many children approximates to the ideal of all pupils achieving their potential in only a few respects. Clearly there are considerable tensions and difficulties encountered in moving the traditional system more towards the ideal. In the next section we consider the data that suggest what the main barriers to easy transition might be.

5.3.4 Barriers Preventing the Achievement of Potential

Recent policy initiatives set out to make education more responsive to all (Section 2.5), but the reality revealed by the data suggests there are barriers preventing the transformation taking place from a selective, elitist educational system serving only a minority to one in which the majority of pupils may attain their potential. The following sections are discussed using table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11 Interpretative Repertoires

| |
|---|
| • The purposes of education |
| • The nature of the school system |
| • Community characteristics and relationships |
| • The role of parents |
| • The concept of identity |
| • The locus of power. |

5.3.4.1 The Purposes of Education (Table 4.12)

The data suggested that within the educational context of this study there was confusion at a philosophical level (Section 4.5.7.1) in the discussions of the participants regarding the purpose of education. This confusion raised questions rather than answers. Is education:

- a once in a lifetime opportunity or a lifelong process;
- the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake or the acquisition of pieces of paper to get a job;
- building up a bank of knowledge or developing thinking skills;
- concern with one's own advancement or involving a responsibility to the community;

- an irrelevance at an immature age, or providing a foundation for future life?

These questions can be considered at a philosophical level. Should the purpose of education be for economic responsibility and practical use with the concept that the prerequisite of a successful nation depends on children achieving their fullest potential (Section 2.3.1.1)? A concept of education for freedom would aim to educate the whole child beyond intellectual education: a balance of engaging hands, heart and head and the right to preserve the original nature of the children by careful control of their education and environment (Section. 2.3.1.2). The concept of education with a social consciousness would require coordination of the diverse influences of the various social environments into which people enter: the family, the street, the religious association, and so on, and provide them with different standards of judgement and emotion for different occasions as they pass from one environment to another (Section 2.3.1.4).

When considering who should be involved in the decision-making about the purposes of education — the professionals, the parents, the children — it must be born in mind that it is the state that provides free education for all.

“schooling is...a social institution that is provided out of public funds, and is to that extent accountable to the desires of taxpayers and their democratically elected political representatives.”

(Carr, 2003, p15)

The National Debate of 2002 (Section 2.5) produced broad agreement about the purposes of school education, sharing a view that children and young people should have a broad education and develop the skills to be active citizens of a modern Scotland

and that they should leave school ready for the world of work, training, college or university:

- “literate and numerate;
- creative and skilled at solving problems;
- responsible and active members of society, considerate of others;
- ambitious, enterprising and confident, able to succeed in a world where they value others and are valued for themselves;
- motivated to continue learning throughout life.”

(Educating for Excellence, 2003)

The five National Priorities in Education were approved by the Scottish Parliament and continue to be seen as the building blocks for Scottish education.

This clarity of purpose needs to be clearly stated and understood by all: teachers, parents and pupils and all must stand by this purpose in order to enable the children and young people to achievement their fullest potential. The key question is what do schools need to do to in order to assure this happens for most pupils?

5.3.4.2 The Nature of the School System (Table 4.13)

There was a clear view emerging in the study (Section 4.5.4.7) that the nature of the present school system does not cater for the needs of the majority of the children. It was seen as a middle class system with middle class values, with those who cannot or will not conform to the system being alienated and frustrated. While those children and parents with shared high aspirations in the academic field continue to do well and are considered to achieve their potential (P in Figure 5.2), others, where either parents and/or children do not consider academic achievement as valuable or attainable, are considered as failing in this achievement.

Over the last 50 years there have been very many changes in learning and teaching, the curriculum, assessment and the examinations systems. Changes within primary schools since the publication of the primary memorandum (1965) and through 5–14 developments (1990s) have not been in conflict with the expectations of the school and the parents. These changes were a move away from whole class teaching which was often aimed at the middle ability pupils leaving the able unsatisfied and the pupils with learning difficulties out of their depth, to group teaching where pupils were grouped according to their ability for some subjects and social groupings for others. This, in theory at least allowed the pupils to work individually or in groups at their own level of ability and according to their aptitude. Assessments measure the progress they make in English language and mathematics according to their stage of development and ability.

In secondary schools however the barriers and tensions have been greater particularly when some young people reach the teenage years and can't or won't conform to the requirements and strictures of the system. Data from the study showed that the values of teachers working in the secondary sector in particular were found to be different from a large percentage of the pupils in the system (Section 4.5.4.2). Secondary schools are large organisations requiring a hierarchy of rules and codes of conduct to run smoothly. In what has to be a controlled environment for health and safety reasons if none other, teachers expect polite, respectful, responsible, well-mannered children who conform to the rules and codes of conduct and they lay that responsibility squarely on the parents (Table 4.15). Parents who live in a disordered and chaotic world find it difficult to prepare their children for this world. Many parents set the responsibility at the door of the school. This setting is no longer the best to enable all the youngsters to achieve their

fullest potential. Bentley (1998) proposed that learning should not take place only inside schools and colleges but in communities, workplaces and families. He said:

“It requires a shift in our thinking about the fundamental organisational unit of education, from the school, an institution where learning is organized, defined and contained, to the learner, an intelligent agent with the potential to learn from any and all of her encounters with the world around her.”

Bentley (1998)

Although there have been many changes in Scottish education the basic school structures and systems have not changed over the last century. Osborn et al. (2003) explored the education systems of Denmark, France and England, and found them to be informed by three very different principles of organisation: Denmark communitarian, France state controlled and England laissez faire. Despite the influence of the cultural filters that the children brought into the process of schooling from their individual family background, their perceptions seemed to resonate closely with the particular emphasis of the goals of the national system. Even though widespread and growing international forces encourage convergence, any changes remained relatively superficial in their effect compared to the deep structure of child cultural patterning. In light of this, Scotland's structure and system should be considered in relation to the purpose set for education in Section 5.3.4.1 and the shortfalls of the present system.

5.3.4.3 Parents and Teachers – The Locus of Power (Table 4.17)

Where harmony might be found in the primary schools between parents and teachers this was seen as lacking in the secondary school. What might be termed a power struggle between parents and school was evidenced through this study (Table 4.17).

Parents found the school system frustrating; they found some experiences deeply distressing and often found themselves powerless to do anything about it. The parents felt that their views were not taken into consideration considering that they had the child the majority of the week and the teacher played only a minimal part, seeing them only for short periods of time and consequently could not possibly expect to know the full personality and ways of working of the child (Section 4.5.2.5). The parents felt that they always needed to make a case for their child, a case they often felt was lost (Section 4.5.2.9). Some felt that it might be easier for parents who were better educated or able to negotiate more easily with the system, but even teachers who were parents sometimes expressed frustration.

Some teachers found interaction with parents difficult (Table 4.17) and often did not want to engage in the effort required. Much of the time they felt that their professionalism was being undermined when parents questioned and complained and they had to keep justifying their professional judgement. The conflict often occurred when the parents did not share the same language register as the teachers. Because of this the power struggle manifests itself between the educational and the social side.

Cairney (2000) (Section 2.4.4) considered the need to understand and respond to the relationship between home and school driven by the desire to contextualise school education more firmly. If the relationship between the home and school learning is to be optimised then there needs to be an understanding of the complex relationship between these two social settings. Care is needed to balance acknowledging a community's diversity against seeking to make its families conform to school expectations for learning. To enable all children to achieve their fullest potential in the education system

there is a need to recognise and acknowledge the competing pressures and allegiances that shape these identities and to make the connections necessary to engage all parents. While this study calls for a ‘real’ partnership between parents and teachers it acknowledges that there is not currently a strong imperative seen by teachers to do this or a framework which would enable a real partnership to develop.

5.3.4.4 Community Characteristics and Relationships

The pupils who were considered to be achieving their potential in this study (Table 4.) were particularly those who came from the non-geographical communities where qualifications are the currency of advancement (Section 4.5.4.8). Identified in the area of this study as the communities involved in the oil and gas industry - they might be also be found in banking and insurance, law, medicine or teaching. These professional communities appeared to be served well by a system that recognises achieving academic school qualifications is utilitarian – necessary for the advancement of their future employment. For some of the traditional communities, those associated with, for example farming, fishing and the mills, there was a greater dissonance with the academic aims of the school. Although for a few the school system was seen as an escape route to another lifestyle, for many it remained an irrelevance. Many of the traditional industries depending on ‘on the job’ training, being ‘born to be a farmer’ or following the traditional route to the fishing boat or factory did not find any common points of contact with an academic curriculum and paper qualifications since these were irrelevant to engagement with their future work and identification with the adult community (Section 4.5.2.7).

However, the changing face of the community has brought education and schooling to the forefront of the minds of those in the traditional communities (Section 4.14). The demise of the traditional industries and the increase in job mobility including the outward migration of local people to find skilled work with oil companies in the North Sea or abroad and an inward migration in from eastern Europe taking the low paid jobs which previously absorbed school leavers, create major issues for the traditional communities. The issues emerging are a lack of loyalty to the traditional community, the breakdown in the infrastructure of the traditional ways of the community and instability in the economic viability of the community (Section 4.5.2.8)

Teachers and parents in the study (Section 4.5.2) who belonged to the area recognised that education has a responsibility to the communities it serves and where the school system is not working it should be changed to acknowledge, cater for and engage with the local issues. It has to be said, however, that while some teachers recognised the issues, few saw a need for them proactively to engage with change in the educational system. This responsibility to the community has been recognised in the national priorities for education (Scottish Executive, 2000) in particular the one which emphasises values and citizenship and recommends working with parents to teach pupils respect for themselves and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society. They also recommend educating young people in ways that prepare them for living effectively and responsibly as members of local, national and global communities as vital to the wellbeing of humanity now and in the future.

Some teachers and parents who talked of these cultural issues expressed clearly their views on good parenting (Table 4.15) and said professional intervention should be used

to assist with difficulties. If parents fulfilled the good parenting tick boxes then the child's achievement of potential would be more likely. The Scottish Executive (1998) had a similar view when it introduced New Community Schools using cross-agency working to work with children, families and localities:

“to promote social inclusion and to raise educational standards...

We expect good outcomes for children's education, but also social welfare, their health and the well-being of the community where they live.”

(Scottish Office, 1998)

Humes (2004) in a review of the New Community Schools initiative considered the ‘in school’ and ‘out of school’ factors in accounting for educational success and failure and recommended a look beyond the simplistic accounts of the extremes of the social determinist line where everything is dependent on the cultural capital the child brings to school and the opposite extreme of dismissing the relevance of social disadvantage.

Humes (2004) when talking of the relationship of the school system and the home/community said:

“it is a matter of acknowledging that we now inhabit a variety of ‘worlds’ with competing pressures and allegiances, which serve to constrain or liberate our actions, and shape the identities which we present to others.”

(Humes, 2004)

5.3.5 Identities (Table 4.16)

All the systems for achieving potential are predicated on people's views of others' roles, some chiming in harmony and some resonating in conflict. People have a variety of roles in which they engage, formed by their historical and cultural background particularly their early childhood years, their educational experiences, their individual life journey and encounters with critical events or individuals. Identity underpins the roles people play and is the core of a person's being where they are secure and confident, where they hold their fears and phobias.

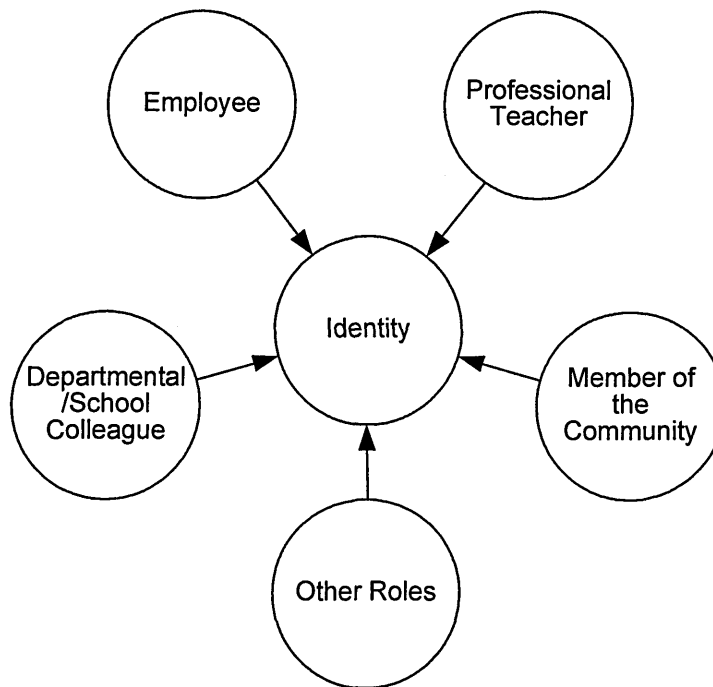
5.3.5.1 Teachers, Their Roles and Identity

In this study the teacher was found to have a set of roles, as a professional, as an employee and as a person (Table 4.16). Professionally the teacher has status in the community, having been educated to degree level, with competencies in their chosen subjects, in the teaching of their subject and in children's learning. Secondary teachers with their advanced specialist knowledge have considered themselves different from primary teachers who have more generalist knowledge and in the past had lesser qualifications. Within the secondary schools certain subjects are considered to be of a higher status than others, the 'true academic' subjects, such as sciences and mathematics, in contrast to social, practical and aesthetic subjects (Appendix 6, p. 268). Secondary teachers have in the past considered themselves (and many continue to consider themselves) as the teacher of their specific subject only and not of any other aspect of education, while most primary teachers have become carer, mentor and perhaps adopt other roles in addition to their role as teacher. A teacher's specialist knowledge in teaching and learning is recognised as technically advanced and is rarely

challenged by non-professionals as they believe them to be the people trained to do the job although in reality, some teachers are known to be well informed subject specialists but poor teachers in the sense of applying modern methods of pedagogy and management of pupils. The teacher, as an employee of the council, must adhere to the policies of the employer, the local authority and its representatives and for them directly and particularly, the head teacher. Depending on circumstances in the staffroom they may move to other roles depending on their relationship with colleagues. The teachers move in and out of the various roles that they portray sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously depending on the context.

It is the teacher's personal identity, their personality and capability, aptitude and attitude to the job, which is perhaps the key to supporting the children in the development of their potential. Some teachers are recognised as 'born to be a teacher' and this influences their engagement with pupils and has been seen to change pupils' lives both as exemplified in this study and in the literature. Many teachers are sensitive and responsive to the geographical and social context of their work place intimately, particularly those who have been born and brought up in the vicinity and are totally familiar with the catchment area of the school and the wider communities in which it is located. The personal circumstances, such as other individuals in the lives of the teachers, affect their attitude to the situations they encounter and their ways of dealing with them whether it is a detached attitude, which implies that the situation is nothing to do with them or a caring and nurturing attitude which sets out to help, support and advise beyond the boundaries of their role as a teacher and requirements as an employee.

Figure 5.3 Identity - The Teacher

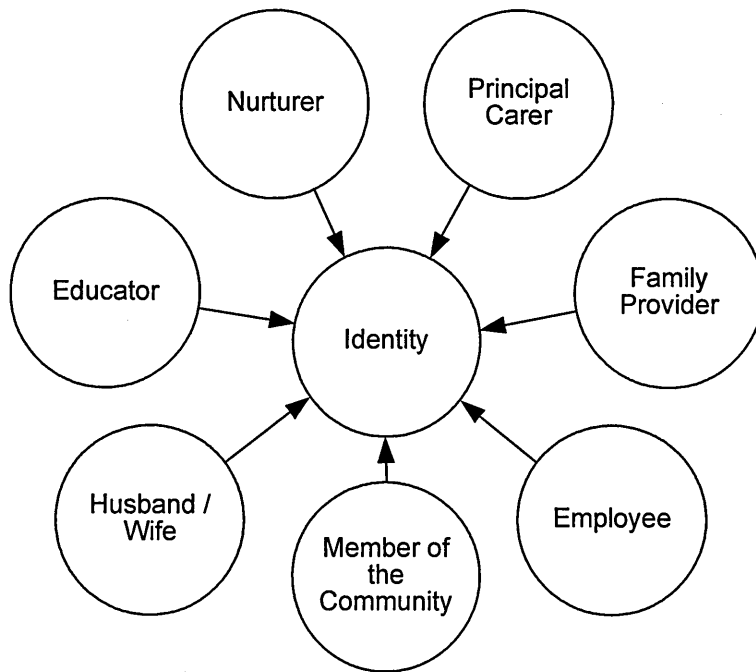


5.3.5.2 Parents – Their Roles and Identity

The parent has a set of roles — the principal carer, the nurturer, the educator and a guardian of children until they are 16 years old. The characteristics of these vital roles are displayed through parenting skills — communicating with the child, committing time to the child, leading by example and providing family rules and boundaries. The quality depends to an extent on the parents' knowledge, their repertoire of these skills and understanding developed mostly in their own early home and community history and to an extent through their education. As a member (Section 2.3.2) of a variety of communities – of family, purpose, relationship, geography and history, the culture of the communities helps to form the parents' understanding and attitudes, particularly in their engagement with education. In addition the parents are likely to have additional roles

which may be considered relevant, such as a professional role of their own which they will step in and out of as appropriate.

Figure 5.4 Identity – The Parent

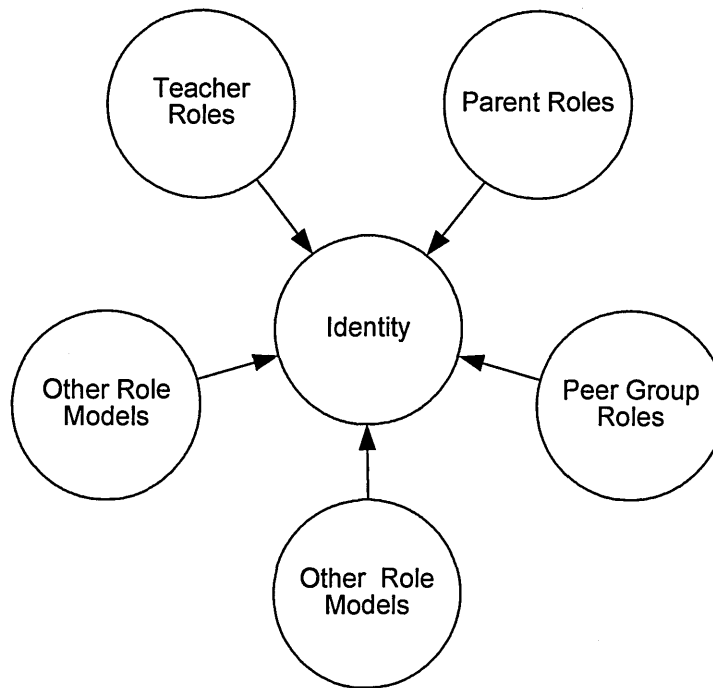


5.3.5.3 The Child and the Development of Identity

Geertz (1973) (Section 2.3.2) when talking of culture saw ‘man’ as an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. Securing one’s identity is similar to this, where the children are suspended in the web and must weave the web towards their fullest potential where they are at one with themselves, happy doing what they are interested in at their own ability level – as the parents specified. Children in their formative years are developing their identity based on and shaped by the roles played by the people around them, the main protagonists in their life - in their home environment,

family, school environment, teachers and, at some stages in their growth, in their peer group.

Figure 5.5 Identity – The Child



As the children cross from one context to another they learn the rules and decipher what is acceptable and not acceptable in that context. Given a safe, secure environment, an environment with clear and consistent codes of discipline and rules of behaviour and a conducive learning environment a child quickly learns and responds to the codes and rules. Young children like praise, rewards, and being loved so usually they will be willing to follow the rules necessary to receive the rewards. When children grow older, and as they look to developing their own identity they want to test the boundaries to find out what happens should they not chime in harmony with the school. It is necessary to enable the opportunities to take them to higher levels of personal knowledge and confident engagement with the variety of challenges they may encounter in the future.

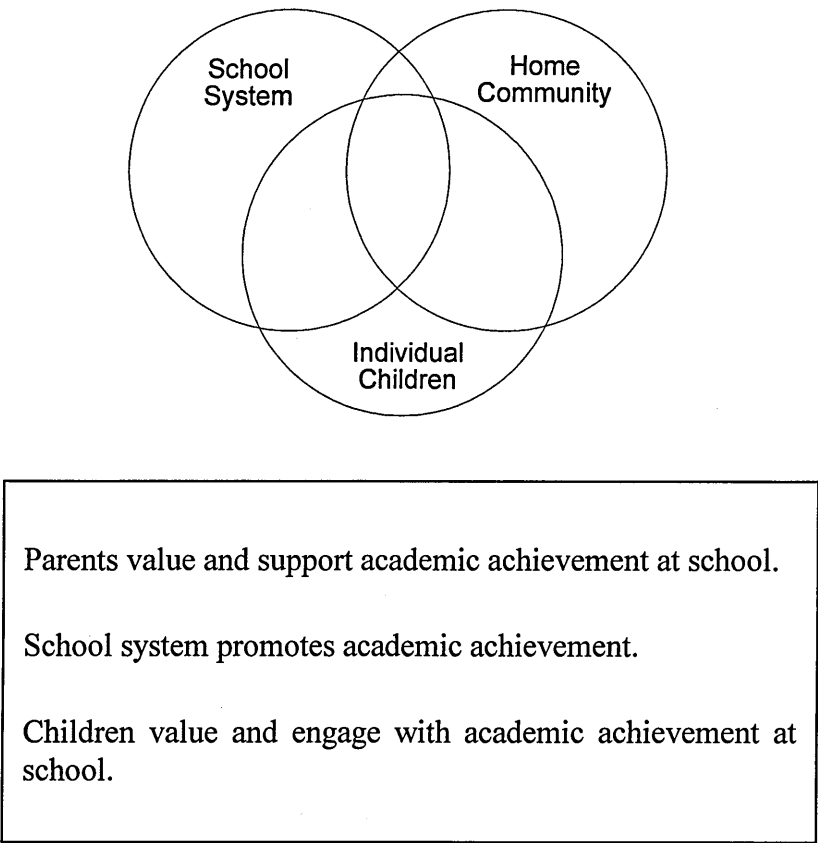
5.4 Achieving the Fullest Potential – From Diverse Experiences

5.4.1 Introduction

In Figures 5.1 and 5.2, the attainment of potential from a traditional and ideal perspective was represented. Over the past thirty years the schools of Scotland have been moving from the traditional model, in which few attained, towards the ideal, in which the majority of the population are able to feel that the education system has supported the full development of their diverse skills and talents. The degree of success in this will depend on the extent to which schools have successfully recognised and engaged with the barriers outlined in 5.3.4 and 5.3.5 above. Also, the realisation of this ideal will mean different things in different schools, in different social contexts and from the perspective of different individual pupils. The form and function of schools are clear when they inaugurate a selection process for a small proportion of academically oriented young people. However, as the purposes of education widen and diversify and as schools seek to engage productively with a wider range of educational needs associated with children from diverse social contexts, it becomes less clear how to offer effective and positive educational experiences for the majority.

5.4.2 Models of Diverse Educational Experiences

Figure 5.6: The Educational Context for the Academic Child



There is a subset of children for whom the conditions for attainment of potential approximates to the traditional academically oriented model.

This diagram represents an educational context in which there is a significant overlap between the school system, the home/community environment and the individual children with respect to values and aims. These three aspects that are key to the achievement of potential are operating in harmony.

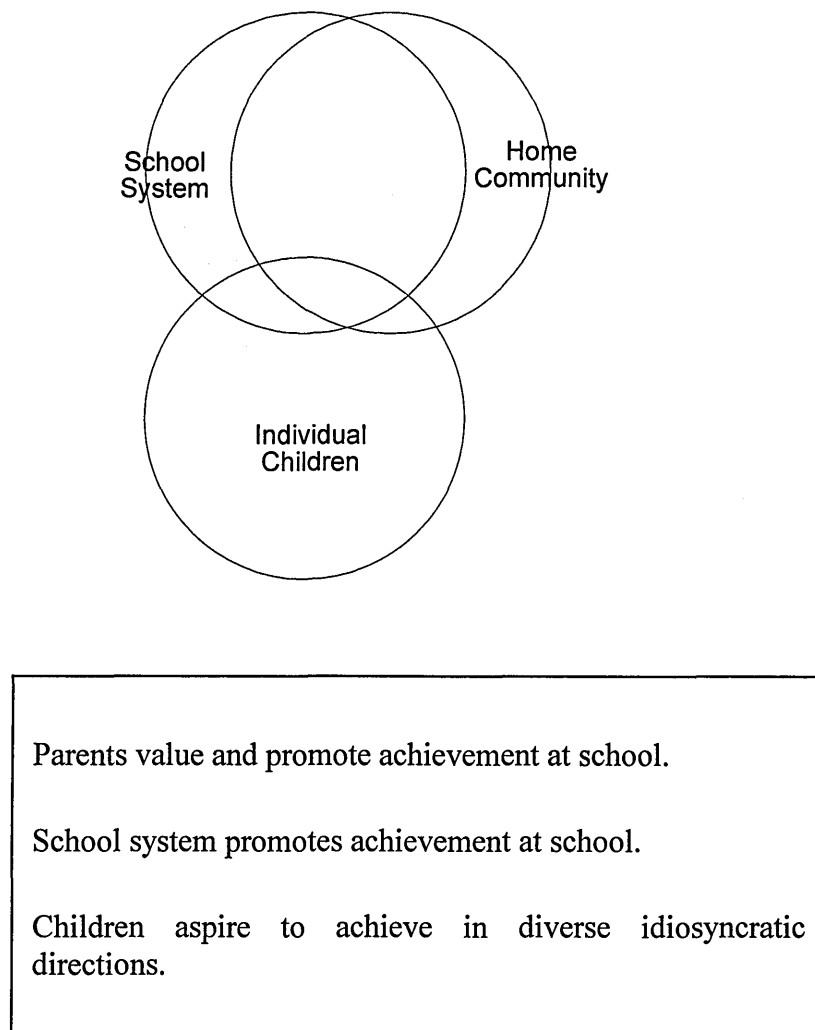
In this context, an academically oriented school system, a middle class system according to the data in the fieldwork - and typically middle class parents living in a middle class environment are in harmony. Both parties are likely to have successfully passed through the education system themselves and set a high value on the acquisition of academic qualifications. These are held to be valuable as an important factor in enabling the young to enter pathways towards what is regarded as appropriate professional employment in adult life. As indicated in 5.3.2, the pupils for whom this context is successful are those who have the personal characteristics and motivation to engage with the academic curriculum and accept the requirements set within such a regime, and who share the academic goals and career trajectories made available by the academic qualifications gained.

Another group for whom this context can be successful within a school was illustrated in the data gathered using the vignette on Rose, the child with learning difficulties. Teachers and parents talked positively about the particular needs of these 'individual' children, and how the Authorities provided resources to support their individualised needs. Although opportunities were provided for flexible inclusion into the school system in harmony with the individual requirements, children with such levels of learning disabilities are often accommodated in special units or bases within the secondary school, and their presence does not challenge, intrude into or disrupt the activities in the academic streams of the certificate years

In summary, the individual children represented in this diagram are those who are at ease with the type of roles predicted for them through the expectations and aspirations of the school system and through the home environment, and who are able to behave

and secure an identity conducive to the achievement of ‘potential’ as defined by the fulfilment of these personal, academic and professional aspirations.

Figure 5.7 The Educational Context for the Idiosyncratic Child



This diagram represents an educational context where two of the elements are in harmony and one is in conflict. The school system and the home/community factors are in harmony both sharing and supporting the value of the current context of education in the achievement of potential as defined by the academic subject curriculum. The third element, the individual child, however, is in conflict. There are groups of children who are unwilling to adopt the roles projected on to them within the school system or the

roles presented to them by those in the home/community. Rather, they choose other role models and other directions for themselves.

The data gathered in the fieldwork using the vignette on Craig, who rejected the view of both the school and his mother that having school qualifications would be of value, identified some possible reasons for such non-conformity. The data suggest that on some occasions it was caused by the move from primary school to secondary school, i.e. from a caring community to a large impersonal organisation; sometimes by the placement in a class with a negative, rebellious peer group influence; sometimes by the attitude of teachers who had expectations of achievement beyond the individual's capabilities at that stage. Additionally, for pupils who see their future roles in a work context where academic qualifications are of little value, there is little incentive to apply themselves to an uninteresting academic curriculum. For such children, typically labelled 'non-academic', there is little provision of interesting and engaging occupational courses.

Another group of children who fall into this category are those who have particular and peculiar interests, dispositions, personalities or talents which are not valued, or which cannot be fully developed within the rigid confines of the typical Scottish secondary school.

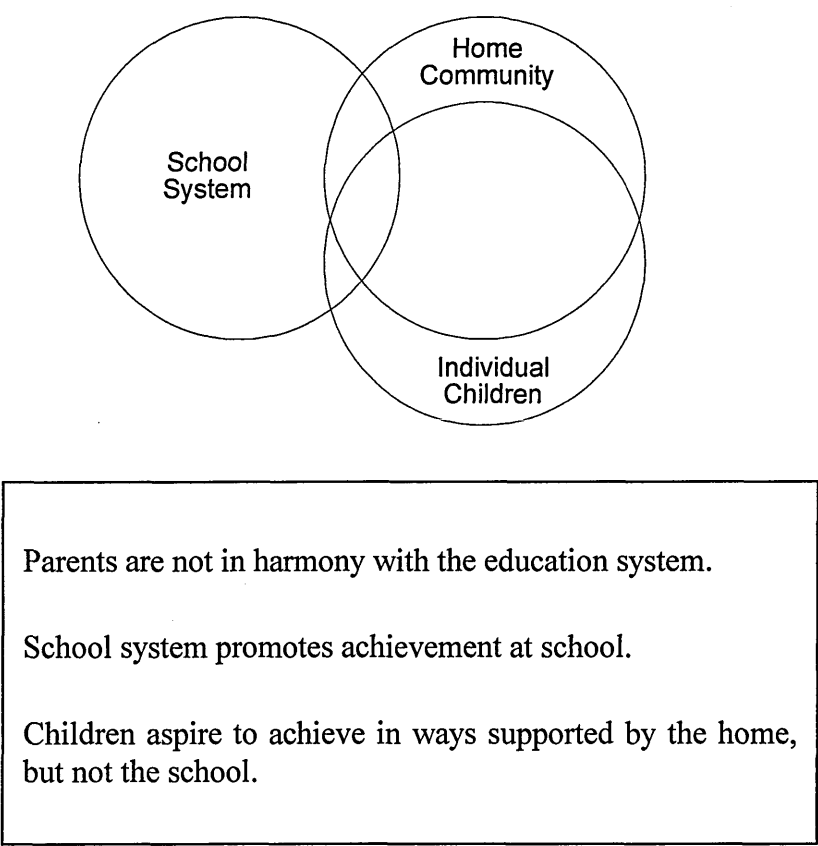
If Mozart and Jesus Christ had attended Scottish schools, they would have been expelled. Mozart would have been excluded for being different, and Christ for having a general attitude problem.

(Simpson, 1997).

Such children may wish to follow inclinations towards an artistic or creative route rather than the academic one as identified in the fieldwork as that most valued by many of the teachers, and one which was most easily supported by them. Where individual children are found to have special aptitudes in areas such as music, dance or sport the parents may choose to make alternative arrangements to enable their talents to be developed.

In summary, the children represented in this diagram are those who are ill at ease with the type of roles predicted for them and prepared for through their participation in school. Consequently many cannot or will not behave in a manner to secure an identity conducive to the achievement of ‘potential’ as defined by that participation.

Figure 5.8 The Educational Context for the ‘Opted-out’ Child



Here the diagram presents an educational context in which the values and aspirations of individual children and the home/community are in harmony, but are in conflict with the school system. The individual children have adopted the roles projected in the home/community but these are incompatible with the roles and values supported by the school system.

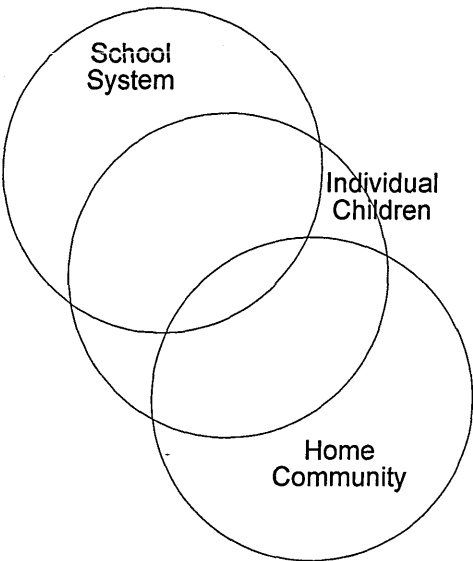
The data in the fieldwork suggests that the educational values of the home environment and the education system may differ because of cultural practices or religious beliefs. Adults in the home environment may disagree with the curriculum or educational context provided to such a degree that they decide to take an alternative route e.g. such as education at home, or by sending their child to non-state provision such as the Waldorf schools. It is interesting that there are now fewer experimental schools than there were forty years ago in the North-east of Scotland. At the present time most schools with radically different approaches to education are typically reserved for fairly disturbed young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, which prevent them from being educated within the present school system.

Sometimes the lifestyles of the home/community make it difficult for the children to attend and achieve normally. The children of travelling communities would fall into this category. Distributing laptops and making the normal curriculum on-line was one proposed scheme for extending the reach of the school out to such groups. However, many would still argue that although the travellers value education, much of the curriculum and certification systems are seen as irrelevant for their children's future roles and lifestyles, and school attitudes and arrangements make it difficult for their children to benefit from school experiences (Padfield, 2005).

One section of the stable population reported in the data had similarly little positive engagement with the school system throughout their children’s schooling. They portray negative attitudes towards the teachers, often as a consequence of their own negative experiences at school, and are frequently seen as undermining the system e.g. taking the child’s side automatically against the school system, and regularly removing the children for holidays. They instil attitudes in their children that are negative towards the system, seeing it as a compulsory hindrance to engagement with things they consider important and value in their lifestyle. These children have no expectation of achieving their academic potential as defined by the school and may gradually become the truants or the exclusions depending on the personality of the children.

In summary, the individual children represented in this diagram are those who are ill at ease with the type of roles predicted for them through the expectations and aspirations of the school system because of the home environment, and who look in other directions to secure their identity and to achieve their ‘potential’ as defined by the fulfilment of these personal aspirations.

Figure 5.9 The Educational Context for the ‘Commuting’ Child



Parents lack the resources or commitment to support the children to achieve academically

School system promotes academic achievement.

Children value and engage with academic achievement at school but must live within a non-supportive home context.

This diagram represents an educational context where there is little overlap between the school system and the home/community yet a significant overlap of both by the individual children. The children are able to find some identification with the roles projected in their home environment and to the roles projected at school but must find some way of successfully commuting between the two. Those in the home environment either have a value system that is incongruent with those in the school system or do not have the resources necessary to be in harmony with and supportive of the school aims and values.

The data gathered using the vignette about James, whose family's wish for him to stay on the farm conflicted with his computing career aspirations, stimulated discussion on home/school value systems, and those contexts in which they come into conflict. Many of the parents in the north east of Scotland were considered to place low value on the benefits of the education system. They included those who work in the traditional industries where knowledge, understanding and skills are seen to be acquired through 'on the job' training and not by means of academic qualifications. Their perceived lack of vision, seen as negative by those who valued education, does not prevent their children from achieving in the school system but does give the children the additional

challenge of coping with two value systems, elements of which may be in tension and conflict.

A recent phenomenon in the north east of Scotland that produces a child straddling two cultures has been the migration of large numbers of workers from Eastern Europe. In this context, many parents do not have the language resources to communicate successfully with the school nor are they able to provide their children with educational support in a school system different from their own experience.

An often hidden aspect of home life is that of children who are carers, and who similarly straddle different cultures with roles and values which may be diverse and in conflict. These children may be willing to engage fully in school life, but may have significant additional duties at home which make this difficult. Relatively unsupported by their home, they may need considerable flexibility within the school, rather than the imposition of rules and timekeeping, which typically prevails.

In summary, the individual children represented in this diagram are those who may be at ease with the type of roles predicted for them through the expectations and aspirations of the school system, but who must also cope with the very different roles expected of them in the home environment. Recognition of the complex conflicts with which these children are presented would allow schools to assist those in this situation to manage their difficulties and help them towards resolutions, rather than contributing further to the confrontations and tensions in their young lives.

5.4.3 Conclusion

The models are also useful in helping to ensure that educational issues are framed in a holistic manner. This will be useful at a strategic level i.e. national and local government levels. A key task in a given context (local or national) is to figure who is 'out of step'. This will involve being clear about who makes the judgement or how the judgement is made and the criteria that are being used. Bourdieu (in Stephenson 2003) noted, 'education is social reproduction' meaning that it is intimately linked with the power structures in society resulting in debate where there will be many deeply entrenched views amongst the differing stakeholders.

5.5 Achieving the Fullest Potential – Implications for Policy and Practice

5.5.1 Implications for Nature of Informing Principles in School System

In this study, three main features were identified as having a key role in determining the outcomes of education – the social context, the learning and teaching context and the characteristics of the individual child. In this section some of the key features of these and their interactions are examined and the changes that need to be advanced in the education system identified. These include the introduction of new concepts for thinking about learning and teaching and changes in the mindsets of both teachers and pupils about learning and ability; the development of effective pedagogies; and the development of schools as learning communities.

From at least the 1960s, educationists have raised concerns about the extent to which the school system reflects a middle class ideology. Teachers and parents who have a middle class identity use the same register in their speech and language, and are likely to have values and aspirations in common. (see Figure 5.6) Littlejohn (2002) suggests that:

“people learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes they employ.”

(Littlejohn, 2002, p.178).

The code that a person uses symbolizes their social identity.
(Bernstein, 1971)

Where there is harmony between the ethos, class and aspirations of the home and school children have more opportunities to engage productively with the system, thus facilitating them to achieve their potential depending on their own personal characteristics, capabilities, aptitudes and attitudes. Avenues of communication remain open even in times of conflict because it will be possible for the protagonists to engage the same language register, and use the rules accepted within their social class transactions.

For the disappointed, the disaffected and the disillusioned, alternative physical settings for schooling and an alternative context for learning and teaching should perhaps be considered as possible routes to enable those young people towards achieving their fullest potential. This will be increasingly possible as information technology allows parents and others immediate access to information previously privileged as belonging to the school, and which enables the identity of the learner – in terms of age, gender or class to be completely hidden or less salient.

There is a sense in which no child fails in the primary school system and the data in this study confirms this view. Although there is an expectation nationally that an increasing percentage of the pupils achieve a specified level within the 5-14 curriculum by a certain age and stage in the primary school, children are seen to progress through the levels A – F according to their age, maturation, motivation and engagement, aided or hindered by their home community environment and the school environment. This view supported by Hart et al (2004) allows children to achieve given their educational and social contexts. The teachers in the primary school were considered in the study to know their children well and were seen as effective promoters of the achievement of potential in a range of curricular, personal, physical and emotional areas.

“At primary, you know, we really look after them and look out for them.”

“Scottish schools have at their heart a vision of enabling all children and young people to thrive and achieve their full potential as learners and as members of society.”

(Scottish Government, 2005)

However the business of the secondary school, according to this study, remains ability based dominated by subject teaching, the more academic the subject the more prestigious it is in the eyes of the teachers, and by the outcomes of a centralised exam system albeit less academic than in the past. A testing and classification route designed for setting according to ability as described by Hart et al (2004) still prevails within an age related, lockstep system from S3, and increasingly as a result of a variety of changes such as setting and curriculum acceleration introduced by teachers, even from S1 and

S2. Whilst the curriculum is progressive on paper, in practice a series of barriers are in place if the child does not achieve certain levels by certain dates.

Secondary teachers were perceived by parents to be lacking in the knowledge of their children's potential based on their capabilities, interests and motivations perhaps because of the number of children taught per week or sometimes because of the disinclination of some children to engage with an impersonal system..

"I asked my 12 year old what his potential is. He had an idea. I asked if the teachers would know what it was. He said that they couldn't possibly know as they would need to know him very well and they don't."

"Once in the secondary, there is not the same care or personal touch."

Nevertheless the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act etc. 2000 (Scottish Parliament, 2000) sets out the rights and responsibilities of parents and local authorities to secure:

"an education directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential."

(Scottish Parliament, 2000)

5.5.2 Learners and Teachers: New Concepts for thinking about Learning and Teaching

There is therefore a requirement that teachers must assume that all children have the right to achieve their potential and must take into consideration the child's age and maturity and the environmental context he comes from and is placed into. (Figure 5.2)

There is pressure on the teachers to offer the best learning environment and teaching styles for the child. Through the influences of those such as Gardner (1983), Feuerstein (1991), Goleman (1998), Hart et al (2004), Dweck (2006), etc a wider range of concepts for thinking about learning and teaching have been introduced.

These offer a more diverse and richer set of concepts than the way in which teachers typically think of intelligence or ability, of how learners think about themselves, and about how teachers can make a significant difference to the effectiveness of pupils' learning.

Gardner's seven core forms of intelligence were his effort to set out intellectual regions in which most human beings have the potential for specific advancement, extending the narrow traditional concept of IQ which in schools revolved primarily around linguistic and mathematical skills as defined by the curriculum and academic tasks of school. Children are now seen by some to have 'dominant intelligences' and ones which are latent or less developed. Goleman further contended that emotional intelligence is now as crucial to a child's future as abilities derived from standard academic fare. The popularity of these concepts with the teaching force have seen the development of teaching programmes in which teachers claim to be teaching to allow the use of aspects of the intelligences which best suit the children's learning style. The teacher is key in the conduct of the programme. However, in the view of Hart et al. (2004) there has been a general failure of teachers to abandon the concepts of fixed intelligence or abilities, and these are still too embedded in the systems of the school to be readily set aside. Hart et al (2004) declared that everyone without exception has the capacity to learn and everyone's capacity for learning can be increased if the forces that constitute it can be changed in ways experienced by young people as more enabling. The teacher's

role is of transformability ensuring that the present position plays a pivotal role in determining the path of the future.

Programmer, mediator, promoter, transformer, Hart et al (2004) describes the role of the teacher when dealing with young people striving to achieve their identity (see Figure 5.3) within the school context.

“They (the teachers) look for ways of working with rather than against these identities, knowing that young people will resist and subvert teachers’ efforts to engage them if they do not feel accepted and affirmed in their identities in the school context. On the other hand, they also try to open up and encourage young people actively to consider alternative identity options so that they do not remain trapped in identities that unnecessarily limit their future life chances.”

(Hart et al. 2004, p.184)

In the view of Dweck (2006) however, it is not only the teachers who have adopted the ‘fixed ability’ mindset. Not surprisingly, many pupils and students who are continually exposed to a judgemental and sorting system of education come to believe that they are incapable of learning. Dweck (2006) concluded that everyone is capable of effective learning if they adopted a ‘growth mindset’ and were supported by the right teaching. Regardless of what the child is deemed to be capable of, their own effort is the key to the ignition of that engagement which turns into accomplishment, and that potential is achieved when children find their way to using their abilities with confidence. She saw the mission of parents, teachers and coaches to adopt and to promote a ‘growth mindset’ in learners to achieve their potential. The change in teachers’ mindset that Hart et al

describes is a necessary prerequisite for a change in the mindset on the part of the pupils.

A context for the promotion of such a growth mindset is offered by Feuerstein's concepts of mediated learning experiences which exposes the child to two types of learning situations, that of direct learning and that of mediated learning. In the latter the teacher intervenes in the process placing themselves between the learner and the response, and selecting, changing, amplifying and interpreting both the stimuli that comes to the learner and the learners' responses. Mediated learning is claimed to improve the situation of cognitive deficiency and encourage the child to become an independent and self-regulating learner. In this model the teacher is seen primarily as a mediator.

5.5.3 Teaching and Learning: The Development of Effective Pedagogies

As Hart has indicated, the old concepts of intelligence and ability are so embedded in the system, particularly in the sorting, grouping and setting practices of the secondary school, that the comprehensive ideal has failed many learners.

“We now believe that it was the failure to move on from preoccupations with groupings to concentrate on the elaboration of effective pedagogies that caused the all-through comprehensive project to falter.

(Hart et al. 2004, p.13)

In order to engage in effective pedagogical interactions with the children, the teachers must firstly recognise the role models the children have encountered, especially those

they bring from home, and must use their professional understanding of the theories of learning to engage the children's motivation and take their capabilities and aptitudes to a new level of understanding both of the world and of themselves.

As an outcome of this study, learning is considered to take place in a social context and potential is defined within a social context. The more formally structured learning approaches have been found not to engage many pupils, whose cultural background does not significantly overlap with the schooling system. (See Figure 5.8) A more holistic embedded approach is needed and pedagogy that reflects this is supported by recent theories of learning.

Mayes and Freitas (2004) (Section 2.4.3.1) in their review of learning theories for an e-learning study considered three different perspectives on learning on which teaching could be modelled – the associationist, the cognitive and the situative. Formal schooling, they found, tends towards the associationist and cognitive end of the continuum.

In the teaching based on associationist models of learning there is a process of connecting elementary mental or behavioural units through sequences of activity where the teachers provide encouragement as pupils achieve better approximation to the required patterns of performance. The patterns of teaching which include the transmission of the subject knowledge from the teacher, followed by pupil practice, with subsequent application and reproduction conforms to this model and underlies much of the teaching in some secondary subjects.

Within the cognitive approaches to learning the assumptions of constructivism are predominant in which understanding is gained through an active process of creating hypotheses and building new forms of understanding through activity. This has informed many of the teaching approaches in early and primary education but has been more difficult to establish within secondary subjects. However according to this model, learning is still a lonely individual activity.

A model of learning based on social constructivism acknowledges the key scaffolding role of others. Teachers as well as other learners can promote effective learning by engaging in dialogue with others, developing a shared understanding of the task being undertaken, and providing feedback on the learner's activities and representations. Collaborative group work is typical of the pedagogical framework associated with this theory, and is sometimes found in primary school work, and increasingly in some secondary subjects, although the tasks are not necessarily well framed to promote the type of discussions necessary. Even when they are thoughtfully constructed, the tasks are what have been described as artificial school tasks, not real-life related authentic work.

However, in order to serve the need of a greater proportion of pupils, and assist them to achieve their more diverse conceptions of potential, recent learning theory suggests that the educational system needs to become a different form of community (Renshaw, 2003), and to engage with the social contexts of other communities, recognising and anticipating the greater diversity of the lives which their pupils may eventually lead.

A situative perspective for learning relies on the social perspective where the learner is subjected to influences from the social and cultural setting in which the learning occurs

and also defines at least partly the learning outcomes. As in social constructivism, the social context of learning is emphasised, but this context is likely to be close to – or identical to – the situation in which the learner will eventually practice. This view of learning focuses on the way knowledge is distributed socially. When knowledge is seen as situated in the ‘practices of communities’ (Lave & Wenger, 1990) then the outcomes of learning involve the abilities of individuals to participate in those practices successfully. The focus shifts right away from analyses of components of subtasks and onto the patterns of successful practice in real settings.

“Rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place.”

(Hanks, 1991, p.14)

The authenticity of the environment is at least as significant as the support it provides and much less attention is paid to formal learning activities and to cognitive characteristics.

This study considers the roles of the young people within their social and cultural contexts so if a model of situated learning is applied, involving a process of engagement in young peoples’ community of practice their role models – home, school and leisure — will be taken account of and tasks developed around things that matter in their lives. For a situative perspective to function, a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories needs to be generated and appropriated. A range of resources must be developed – tools, documents, routines, and vocabulary, symbols that in some way carry the accumulated knowledge of the community. The interactions involved and the ability

to undertake larger or more complex activities and projects through co-operation bind people together and help to facilitate relationships and trust.

There are advantages to this way of learning. The learning comes from the relationships between the young people, there is an intimate connection between knowledge and activity, and learning does not belong to individual persons but to the various conversations of which they are part. The teachers' role is to enable the pupils to become participants in 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1990). On one hand the teachers are active participants in the collective effort to build an understanding of the world; on the other, they are professionals charged with the welfare and educational advancement of their pupils. The two roles are compatible but require adjustment.

Scardamalia and Bereiter (1999) illustrate how teachers report it to be exhilarating and liberating to engage in knowledge building along with pupils and in doing so help authenticate it as real knowledge building rather than routine exercises or play acting. The teachers who remain fascinated and involved are the ones who have a dual interest. They are interested in the advancement of their subject and experience advances in themselves as they work with pupils. They are also interested in the understanding itself, the pupils' efforts to explain phenomena, to grasp theories and to overcome naïve conceptions, the pursuit of understanding. An interest in understanding how understanding grows does not seem to be a feature of most people's curiosity. It is an acquired interest and one that initial teacher training ought to advance. Humes (2004) similarly suggested that teachers should also be encouraged to form communities of practice where experiences are shared, knowledge disseminated and a climate of mutual

trust created. Teachers could therefore find this different kind of expertise within a professional community that practices learning – a learning school (Hargreaves, (1999).

5.5.4 Schools and Communities: The Learning School

Situated learning, a socio-cultural learning theory, has been appropriated by the business world to promote new regimes of work and new types of workers. This theory characterises the need to engage workers who need certain dispositions, skills and knowledge such as being a team player, being predisposed to sharing expertise in a distributed system, being committed to joint projects but flexible and adaptive, being able to move on, and being motivated by team success.

“The most successful organization of the future will be a learning organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire.”

(Peter Senge, 1990)

These new economic imperatives and workplaces demand new types of learning, new forms of citizenship and new roles for learners. The kinds of classrooms that are compatible with the new economy bear a resemblance to the ideal promoted above under the notion of situated learning. Renshaw (2003) suggested that a socio-cultural theory of learning directing the attention of teachers to the social concerns of access, inclusiveness, conformity, diversity and status within the community is appropriate at this time. Renshaw argued that there has never been a time when learning should be more valued, or the work of educators more integral to promote this way of learning. He voiced a view that the role of educators is to clarify what is worthwhile learning and what sort of communities of practice we should be learning for and within. The

Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004) potentially provides an excellent vehicle for this way of working. Based on data gathered from three distinctive educational systems, Osborn et al. (2003) advanced a social theory of learning linking the national culture, the peer and sub-cultural groupings and the pupil's personal biography. Their work evidenced the diversity of national culture, values practices and attitudes, which impinged on pupils, leading to different learning experiences, even when the curriculum was superficially similar.

Clark (1996) went one step beyond the learning school by describing schools as learning communities and proposed that they should be seen as vital agencies in the promotion of a learning society which he believed was needed if the social and economic challenges of the 21st Century are to be met successfully. Humes (2004) suggested that schools had to be responsive to change giving pupils opportunities to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills. To do this the school must change its function from that of only a service provider to that of a productive enterprise:

“Schools must become more like the hubs of learning within the community capable of extending into the community.”

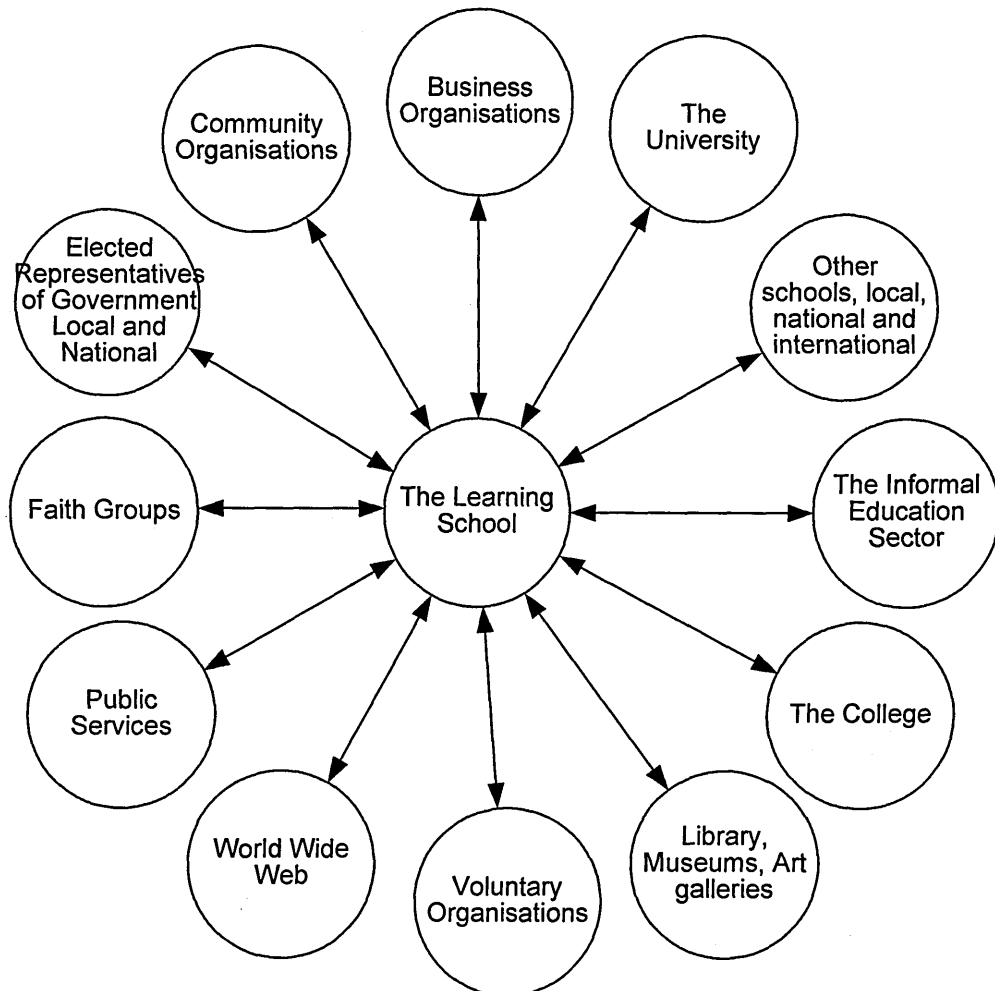
(Leadbeater, 2000)

To do this there would need to be a shift in the thinking about the fundamental organisation of education from school to learner. If learning takes place in a wide range of contexts it is necessary to focus on the connections between people and contexts, which support effective learning. Bentley (1998) proposed that schools become network organisations by establishing themselves as hubs at the centre of networks of learning which reach out to the fullest possible range of institutions, sources of information,

social groups and physical facilities (Figure 5.5). Central to the package, the school needs to provide the base from which to organise learning plans, assessment and validation, and other learning support services as appropriate. The 'traffic' to be managed and directed would be contact, exchange, collaboration between learners and the connections along which such traffic would travel would be the norms and ties of learning relationships.

The life of a system such as this is more organic, less regulated, more chaotic, less predictable, more creative but should enable all children to have an education suitable to their capabilities and persuasion. The focus would not be on imposing order from without but on stimulating the continuous creation of excellence from within allowing them to shape their identities. This would allow children to shape their identities and allow the implementation of a real purpose for New Community Schools rather than the extremes of implying that everything is dependent on the cultural capital the child brings to school versus dismissing the relevance of social disadvantage discussed by Humes (2004).

Figure 5.10 The Learning School in the Community– the Hub of Education



5.5.5 Implications for Practice and Professional Development

“At the heart of an active learning approach is the creative, adaptable professional who can enjoy developing the ideas that arise from children immersed in their learning.

Many teachers are committed to and comfortable with this approach. Others may require support from headteachers, heads of centres and peers to develop their practice with confidence. For all staff, appropriate professional development which builds

understanding, confidence and skill will be an important element in achieving high quality learning experiences for all young children.”

(Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2007)

The policy of the Scottish government has been to promote excellence in education primarily through developing the skills of the profession and to this end each teacher has been allocated thirty five hours Continuing Professional Development annually rising to 50 hours in 2008. This represents a considerable investment of funding directed towards promoting a genuine review of learning and teaching through focused professional development. However, individual teachers have different needs as professionals and must create their own programme of development

The models illustrated in Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 can be used to contribute to this professional development, as they can be used in a variety of settings to prompt discussions, with either a focus on the wider issue of the school and its relationships with those in the community, or of the specific needs of particular groups of children. Head teachers or the planners of programmes of development need to be aware too of the nature of the informing principles in school system identified earlier: the need for the introduction of new concepts for thinking about learning and teaching and changes in the mindsets of both teachers and pupils about learning and ability; the development of effective pedagogies; and the development of schools as learning communities. With these in mind, planning for the most effective professional learning can take place.

However, just as there is considerable variation in the needs and characteristics of pupils, so there is considerable variation in the needs and characteristics of teachers.

Hart et al (2004) in their scenarios described how some teachers have 'fire in their bellies', engaging pupils, having confidence and instilling confidence. They can do that only if they have the particular character to do it.

They tended to be excellent because of some personal trait, experience, viewpoint even physical make-up. It's fairly obvious that this is not something that can be 'taught' to another teacher. The most common concept that I can remember them imparting was 'to find your own way of doing things'.

(Scottish Government, 2007)

"This is something you cannot manufacture or mould a teacher to have, it is simply their personality that comes out in their teaching and means that they are more approachable, accessible to the children who also enjoy the lesson, give feedback, spark off each other. I have as a pupil and mother come across too many excellent teachers and ones that should never be in the profession."

(Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2007)

Some teachers described in this study were described as having a natural ability to adapt to the situations described in Figures 5.6 – 5.9. They found it easy to draw on a variety of mental strategies from their training and life experiences. Hargreaves (1999) reminds us that good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect to their pupils and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.

Other teachers need stimuli and support for them to internalise concepts. They have to work at being a good teacher. If for example they are chosen to undertake a programme

of CPD e.g. Feuerstein's MLE, the act of selection can be enough for them to build their confidence and increase their motivation to do an excellent job. In being chosen, teachers feel they have been given some status in their field and consequently have the motivation to live up to it. These teachers would be able to engage with the issues raised by Figures 5.6- 5.9 should they be given the skills and support necessary to consider and interpret.

There are however some teachers who should never have chosen to be teachers and this came out in the study both from the parents and the pupils. These teachers appear to have a fixed mindset which appears not to allow or to motivate them to change. They attend CPD and pick up ideas here and there and use them in a superficial way until perhaps the next 'gimmick' comes along. These people require focused support and review to enable them to develop.

5.5.6 The Strengths and Limitations of the Study

5.5.6.1 Methodology

The choice of an iterative approach to the methodology offered the opportunity to meet the study's aim by involving a continuing dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, and reanalysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In addition to being iterative, it was interactive, intuitive and open and not simply a record of descriptions of the way things really were or really worked, or of some true state of affairs but involved meaningful constructions formed to make sense of the situation. This gave scope for the unexpected to emerge but was dependent on the author being thoroughly familiar and confident with the data.

The study involved a wide variety of stakeholders who had an interest in education: pupils, parents and educational professionals (teaching and non-teaching). The samples used were purposeful (Patton, 1978) and were planned to give (a) broad and deep data, (b) a variety of stakeholders in rounds one and two, (c) parents in round three and teachers and (d) parents from contrasting districts in round four. The type of sample for rounds three and four emerged from the results of rounds one and two. The actual choosing of the sample was at the discretion of the author in rounds one and two, by invitation in round three and by the head teachers of schools in round four. The choice in rounds one, two and four were subjective and, although criteria were set, the final sample may or may not have been truly representative. Some of the participants in round three appear to have volunteered because they had an issue with the school or the authority now or in the past, which they wished to air. Almost all the participants appeared interested in the study and gave freely of their time, views and opinions. Most were eager to talk of their own experiences in the education system comparing it with now.

The management of one of the focus groups (secondary teachers from B) was particularly difficult. The author was kept waiting in the reception area. The participants gave the impression that they had been given an instruction to attend and would have preferred to be elsewhere. The room allocated was small, cramped and noisy making the recording of the discussion difficult. One male teacher who made every attempt to disrupt the session dominated the group. However, his attempts to challenge the researcher led to discussions, which gave rise to alternative scenarios, which enriched the data.

The methods were variable in outcome. The unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews in the opening two rounds worked well allowing the opportunity to develop themes. When two people were present at an interview the themes developed through discussion and debate. Rounds one and two worked very well with a wide variety of stakeholders producing rich and thick data for analysis. The balance of education professionals versus the parents appeared to be such that in-school educational factors and conditions for the achievement of potential dominated. This determined round three where there was a focus on parents. The findings in round three did add new factors and helped create a framework for the achievement of potential but lacked 'out of the box' thinking. This was because the questions focused in on the present system. Round four was a contrast with a wide-ranging discussion. Here the data was rich and thick and at the close of round four it was felt that the data was saturated and needed no further rounds.

Guba & Lincoln (1989) considered the advantages of their dialectic methodology to be working from a position of integrity, ensuring that all people have an opportunity to communicate, are willing to share power, are willing to change, are willing to reconsider their value positions, and are willing to commit time and energy. They saw the risks as the face-to-face contact, maintenance of privacy, violation of trust, and the decision about which data to use and which not to use. This study considered these factors and the author tried hard to uphold them. The methodology met the aim of gaining information from a broad range, if not a huge number, of stakeholders with an interest in education in the north east of Scotland. The outcomes depended on local contexts, local stakeholders, and local values and this could be taken to other settings. As an emergent process it could not be fully designed in advance for its focus (or foci) depended on

inputs from stakeholders and its activities were serially contingent. The author played many conventional roles in carrying out the study and needed not only technical expertise but also relevant interpersonal qualities.

5.5.6.2 The Researcher

It was occasionally an advantage, but also at times a disadvantage, that the author was a senior officer in the education service and had status in the hierarchy, line managing schools and services to schools.

The advantages were that the author was familiar with the demographics of the area, its economic and political context. She was familiar with the nature of the schools and their catchment thus allowing a purposeful sample according to the type of children in the school, the size of the school and the issues within the school. She also knew the teachers and staff over a long period of years. The author believed that she had trust and integrity in the area and that would allow people to say exactly what they thought.

The disadvantage was that the author had particular status in one area. When people were invited to attend interview in round three of the study, it was possible that some came because they had current issues of conflict with the school or the authority or had done so in the past. However, this gave access to views from parents who seldom attend other more social events in schools, and gave a useful corrective to the very positive views of schooling that is frequently presented by school staff and can be too readily adopted by authority staff such as this author. The area in which the author was not a known official was the area in which some secondary staff were rude, obstructive and possibly gave deliberately provocative answers. The potential distortion which this

could have introduced into their accounts had to be borne in mind when dealing with the data.

5.5.6.3 Timescale

The study took seven years to complete. In 1999 when the proposal for the study was accepted the concept of potential had only recently been introduced in 'Teaching for Effective Learning' (SCCC, 1996). Now the achievement of fullest potential for all is in statute and plans are in place that it is embedded in school effectiveness.

The economic and political environment has moved on in the seven years of the study. A Scottish Parliament has been established: the quality agenda in schools has been put in place and the tempo accelerated for implementation: the local economic and political environment has moved on with significant numbers of migrant workers now in the area and the traditional industries disestablishing at a greater pace than in previous years. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the results are still valid, the tensions and barriers remain, and indeed may be even greater than ever.

5.5.7 Further Work

5.5.7.1 Young People

Young people are at the heart of this study. The findings suggest that they will achieve their fullest potential when they are engaged in an educational experience in schools which is responsive to their current needs as developing individuals, and their future needs as adults in a rapidly changing world. There is a need for further studies which engage with young people regarding their perceptions of schooling, their identity: what

they think it is, who they look to as key influences, and how their relationships with these influences contribute to their developing identity and achieving what they regard as their full potential.

5.5.7.2 Parents

Throughout the study there was a call from many respondents, particularly those outside the schools, for a real partnership between teachers and parents. For all children to achieve their fullest potential the real partnership between pupils, parents and teachers becomes vital. Further research might determine how this might be achieved.

5.6 Concluding Comments

This study, since it has taken a qualitative, nested systems approach, has not produced data or conclusions that are necessarily generalisable in their specific details across other areas of Scotland. It has sought merely to describe and conceptually map some contemporary facts, and some perceptions and experiences of those involved in education in the schools visited. However, many of the findings are of relevance to the thinking of those currently engaged in recent reforms in Scotland which have as their specific aims the promotion of policies to ensure all pupils in Scottish schools achieve their potential.

Previous studies reported in the literature suggested that whilst potential has innate qualities it was generally regarded as remaining relatively fluid, capable of adapting to social settings, personal interactions and the consequences of one's cultural history.

The Scotland Schools Act etc. (2000) etc set out the rights and responsibilities of parents and local authorities to secure:

“an education directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.”

(Scottish Parliament, 2000)

Current initiatives put in place since, determine that all young people have the right to be enabled to achieve their potential in a schooling system that meets their needs. The findings of this study suggested that at present those who are able and want to achieve their potential can do so if this is fairly narrowly defined in terms of the current school subjects and examination system, and if they conform to the strictures and ways of working of the typical secondary school system. This study however, suggests that many pupils are still failing to experience an education that allows the full development of their potential as complex, multi-talented and creative people. The study identified a number of important barriers that prevent young people from achieving in the school system which are associated with: confusion about the purposes of education; the nature of the school system itself; characteristics of the diverse communities which are served by schools; conflict over the role of parents in formal education; tensions in the processes of identity formation in young people; and the power relationships between parents and professionals.

Finally, some of the key features of these and their interactions are examined and the changes that need to be advanced in the education system identified. These include the introduction of new concepts for thinking about learning and teaching and changes in

the mindsets of both teachers and pupils about learning and ability; the development of effective pedagogies; and the development of schools as learning communities.

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APPENDIX 1 - LETTER SENT TO PARENTS INVITING THEM FOR INTERVIEW IN ROUND 3 OF THE STUDY

Area Education Office
St Leonard's,
Sandyhill Road,
Banff.
30 April, 2003

Dear Parents,

I am a Senior Education and Recreation Officer with Aberdeenshire Council. As part of a research project on the achievement of learning potential in Aberdeenshire Schools, I am asking parents their views about their child's present education, their relationship with the school and their aspiration for their child's education in the future.

I shall be in _____ on _____ at _____ and would welcome the opportunity to introduce the project prior to the issue of a list of questions. I shall be available also to answer any queries. If you are unable to attend the meeting but would be prepared to complete the questions please indicate your interest to the Head Teacher.

Thank you for your co-operation and I look forward to meet you.

Yours sincerely,

Anne McArthur.

APPENDIX 2– THE INDICES OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-------|---|---|-------|
| | Durn Ward | 13.67 | | Insch Ward | 7.60 |
| | Banff West And Boyndie Ward | 17.17 | | Logie Buchan Ward | 4.21 |
| | Banff Ward | 18.14 | | Meldrum Ward | 5.69 |
| | Aberchirder Ward | 11.66 | | Udny-Slains Ward | 6.60 |
| | Macduff Ward | 16.24 | | Belhelvie Ward | 6.77 |
| | Gamrie-King Edward Ward | 15.19 | | Insch Ward | 7.60 |
| √ | Buchan North Ward | 19.12 | | Chapel And Gadie Ward | 6.37 |
| √ | Fraserburgh West Ward | 21.72 | | Inverurie North Ward | 5.32 |
| √ | Fraserburgh North Ward | 34.32 | | Inverurie Central Ward | 5.63 |
| √ | Fraserburgh East Ward | 12.90 | | Inverurie South And Port Elphinstone Ward | 8.47 |
| √ | Fraserburgh South Ward | 6.08 | | Kintore And Keithall Ward | 4.88 |
| √ | Buchan North East Ward | 13.07 | | Newmachar And Fintray Ward | 7.18 |
| | South Buchan Ward | 10.22 | | Kemnay Ward | 7.26 |
| | Central Buchan Ward | 12.76 | | Echt Ward | 6.83 |
| | Lonmay And St Fergus Ward | 16.05 | | Kinellar And Westhill North Ward | 4.01 |
| | Mintlaw-Old Deer Ward | 10.36 | | Westhill Central Ward | 1.10 |
| | Mintlaw-Longside Ward | 7.65 | | Elrick Ward | 2.38 |
| | Boddam-Inverugie Ward | 8.62 | | Huntly West Ward | 18.17 |
| | Blackhouse Ward | 8.78 | | Huntly East Ward | 10.80 |
| | Buchanhaven Ward | 22.45 | | Strathbogie Ward | 10.61 |
| | Peterhead Central-Roanheads Ward | 31.81 | | Donside And Cromar Ward | 9.12 |
| | Clerkhill Ward | 22.46 | | Alford Ward | 5.57 |
| | Dales-Towerhill Ward | 14.67 | | Upper Deeside Ward | 8.72 |
| | Cruden Ward | 9.15 | | Aboyne Ward | 6.56 |
| | Turriff West Ward | 8.47 | √ | Mid Deeside Ward | 6.22 |
| | Turriff East Ward | 6.98 | √ | Banchory West Ward | 3.13 |
| | Upper Ythan Ward | 9.95 | √ | Banchory East And Crathes Ward | 4.48 |
| | Fyvie-Methlick Ward | 8.39 | √ | Lower Deeside Ward | 6.31 |
| | Tarves Ward | 5.71 | | Meldrum Ward | 5.69 |
| | Ythan Ward | 5.06 | | Udny-Slains Ward | 6.60 |
| | Ellon Town Ward | 3.37 | | Belhelvie Ward | 6.77 |
| | Logie Buchan Ward | 4.21 | | | |

These are Scottish Executive Indices of Multiple Deprivation for the Wards in Aberdeenshire (2003). The Areas chosen for Focus Groups are ticked.

APPENDIX 3 - THE VIGNETTES USED WITH THE FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Craig

Craig is now 14. He is almost 6 feet and weighs 13 stone. He has been excluded from school 11 times since he went to secondary school, 7 times this session and 4 times within the last month. His last exclusion was for assaulting a teacher in the corridor when according to him he was provoked. Craig doesn't see the point of being in school although he is very capable and would be able to gain 8 standard grades at level 3 or above. He has the ability to gain highers and go on for further education.

Craig lives with his mother and has no other brothers and sisters at home. His mum has a steady job at the chicken factory although her teachers said she was bright enough to go to university. She married Craig's father when she was 16 and pregnant. Craig says he'll get a job at the chicken factory. It will give him an OK life. He has never gone short. There has always been food on the table and gear for him to wear. Craig denies being involved in drugs, but he smokes 20 cigarettes a day. The group he hangs around with have a drink sometimes and are involved in a fight now and then but nothing serious in his view.

His mother thinks he should stick in at school to get the chances she missed. He says there will always be a decent local job for him if he plays his cards right.

What do you think?

Rose

Rose is 11 years old and due to move to secondary education in August.

Rose has physical and mental disabilities. She is very tall for her age and heavy built. When she started school, she was unable to walk and still is a bit awkward. Rose was probably brain damaged at birth. She can sometimes have difficulty making herself understood.

Rose attended a special needs nursery and was expected to remain in a special unit. This was the recommendation of the educational psychologist, the school doctor and the school staff. The parents said no and Rose went to the mainstream school.

Rose has made amazing progress over the 7 years in school. She has been happy. Pupils have accepted her as one of them and include her in their activities. She is behind them generally in her attainment, but has developed on to a remarkable extent.

Now Rose is due to move to the secondary school. Her parents still want her to go to the normal secondary subjects and lessons with other pupils the same age. They feel this would be best for her educationally.

Some school staff feel she would be happier going to the special unit in the school where she can have classes especially for pupils with learning difficulties.

What do you think?

James

James will be 16 in June. He is currently studying for 8 standard grades and is likely to gain most of them at credit level. Next year, he intends trying for 5 highers then hopes to move to Glasgow University to study maths and computing. James has set his sights on working abroad.

James lives with his parents and two sisters on the family farm. It has been in the family for three generations. James's father runs the farm with some part-time help. James is expected to do his share of the tasks at weekends and holidays. James's mother is a full time housewife and mother who is deeply interested in life of the farm. James's sisters left school at 16, one works in the bank and the other at the local mart. Both are dating local farmers.

James's dad is involved in the local community and is presently Chairman of the Community Council. His mother is a keen member of the local WRI.

James's dad is determined that James should leave school in June and commence fulltime work in the business. His future lies at home and the continuation of the business and not in fanciful thoughts. No son of his is leaving home when there is a perfectly good living to be had at home.

What do you think?

APPENDIX 4 - SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

This is a Sample Transcript of a Focus Group.

Area B Parents (Group 2) Six women

| |
|---|
| If you didn't have academy children you would have difficulty giving your views. |
| First reaction is to swop families. Reading this the children are expected to do what their parents did. Craig's slotting into the role his family is in. |
| B is middle class, fairly high expectations of their children maybe not a cross section. The fact that none of us are working. We want better for our kids. |
| James – it is a family issue. I don't think that education authorities can get involved in. Craig's problem has to be addressed by the LA. |
| Craig's mum doesn't want him to go down the same route as she did. She would prefer he stayed on at school. The job has everything he wants, clothes, and food therefore he does not see the need for education as he can get everything he wants. |
| Farming is a business. There are expectations. He has two sisters in the family business. The grandparents may be around. Tradition. Look at how to raise Craig's expectations by putting him in a new situation to do something different. Let them travel. Just activity weeks. He's maybe never been out of his local community. Give them a picture of where they might ultimately be which is different to their local community, as I'll focus on that. |
| What is it that makes James so determined to go on to better himself. It's obvious what makes Craig tick. Craig does not want to be at school. What makes James want to proceed despite opposition? It is interesting both are boys. Could it be transferred to girls? |

| |
|--|
| Why is Craig disenchanted? Where did he miss out? Has he not been taught from the right angle? Has he not had the right subjects? Has he been taught things that are academic with no practical application? Has someone, something never grabbed his interest? |
| He may have felt out – he's tall and big. If his peer group all have low expectations his peer group will have decided long before he's 14 – the influence |
| It is almost seen as that Craig is failing because he wants to leave school at 16 – why should that be failure working in a chicken factory as long as he is happy. Who are we to say that it's wrong? |
| I have taken on an apprentice aged 16, start next week – actively discouraged by the academy but that's what he wants to do – he wants to leave school at 16. Now left school, the school see him as a failure, someone who hasn't made the grade. He's got a job. He'll have more money than those who go to uni. His job is guaranteed for 4 years. Why should that be seen as a failure? |
| Focus their education to do something like his mum but she maybe doesn't know other options. The school should be offering other options. |
| I asked my 12 year old what potential is. He knew. I asked if the teachers would know what it was. He said that couldn't possibly know – need to know them very well. The school doesn't know them well. It's the numbers game. It has to be a partnership, the parents who know the child best, info from careers. Maybe Craig's mum doesn't know the middle ground. The school can't know pupils very well because it is a numbers game. |
| There needs to be info from many other sources. The school needs to show the options and maintain the options as long as necessary. |
| He should be encouraged to stay at school. If he comes out then doesn't like the job, he has lost his exam opportunity. |
| Options have immediately dropped. The school's job is to maximise the options as long as they can. They need to have a way out. |

| |
|---|
| Craig's story will not be resolved until the exclusions are resolved. There is a big problem with boys and school can cope with those that conform but don't cope well with those who can't/won't conform. There is a problem with boys – big problem. Anger management. Makes them anti establishment. This can't be solved by discussing their options. |
| Speak to Craig – My 12 year old can tell you very clearly what satisfies and dissatisfies him. Maybe Craig doesn't know – show him the world beyond, advocate apprenticeships. Very difficult to get apprenticeships these days. If you stay on at school you miss out. |
| Apprenticeship best from 16. |
| Going to uni then drop out. More likely to drop out of uni but haven't lost out on grades. |
| Shame so few apprenticeships. Not enough emphasis put on them by schools. |
| For some children academic courses are never going to grab them but vocational. |
| Trick to use with Craig. Put him on work experience. Talk about work experience age 14-16. School is not for everyone. School doesn't engage him. Make him do a flexible timetable. |
| Get him to be able to use skills to find out other things. |
| Following cultural patterns or a break away. I think that they follow what their parents do – unfortunately. |
| I really feel that it is up to the child. The university is not the B all and end all. It is difficult to get into things without a blinking degree. |
| There are other ways of doing things. For some uni is not the right thing. If you don't go to uni it doesn't mean that you will not be successful. |
| In B, there is a huge pressure that you will get highers and go to university. A danger in B is that it is easy to have a good life and that every one can have that without knowing that you have to work for it. If they don't bother they are not going to live like that. |

| |
|--|
| This is a minority but they don't have any idea about the real world. |
| Trying to get through to them that things aren't like this normally. Girls are easier than boys. Some take it on. |
| Follow on from parents. Yes. Strong expectation. Puts pressure on the kids. Many children under pressure. Dragged through uni. There was this boy who got strait As in his higher and went to uni. He got a first from a salubrious university. Will his parents be happy? What pressure does that say? The girls go to the same uni as mother and grandmother and there is pressure for grades. |
| Those want kids to do like them. Those want kids to do better. Those who say it was good enough for me so it will be good enough for thee. This is all over. We want them to be happy. |
| We sometimes don't have enough info to go a different pathway. We send our kids to friends to discuss their jobs etc. Lots of jobs we know nothing of. |
| James needs confidence in self. What he needs to do is important. He needs to have confidence to stand up against the father. He knows what he wants but needs to give him confidence building. |
| Difficult to get good role models, they also take longer. Unless they are very clear about what they want to do (and a few are) they take a long time to come to decide what to do and it often isn't what they though they would do at 16 or 18. |
| They take longer focus. Boys - short term thinking. Girls see much further. Boys can't see beyond next week. Parents should know that. |
| I want her to decide what she wants to do. I don't want to influence. I can't decide for her. |
| Role models – where should they come from? Is it important to have teachers as role models or something outside? I don't remember ever having teachers as role models. |

| |
|--|
| I had one teacher who inspired and captured my attention. I have wondered about having successful business people in school about their work especially boys where they travelled. It's not all behind a desk. |
| My Craig in 6 th year has just had a talk by last year's 6 th who have been on gap years. Get the 16-18 year olds into school to say I left school to say I left school and this is what happened to me and give them the down side, show that things aren't all rosy. |
| A shop assistant's wages may not allow you to buy your own house. |
| Have people in to tell about the life experiences. |
| We can tell very early the ones who will have difficulties. |
| A lot of 16-18 year old girls low self-esteem look for boost usually from a boy and very often end up pregnant and that is not an exaggeration. |
| The school and the teachers should be aware of this and work very, very hard to raise individual's self esteem. Don't look for credit through someone else. |
| In B huge peer pressure, not cool to do as your teachers ask, it is cool to get pregnant when not married, get council house quicker, have a nice life and be looked after and they are. They brag. |
| B has a lot of middle class people but has expectations of uni. A lot of people who have always been here and are not particularly ambitious. Middle class daughters get pregnant and are embarrassed. |
| A lot of people in B under achieve as it is not cool. |
| It is a lottery what class you fall into. James will maybe break free. It is not beyond. It is different. |
| We need to move away from the idea that one job is better than another job. |

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| Was Craig a problem at playgroup? If parents hadn't recognised he would be a blinking nuisance. If the kids' problems are not identified early and seen to they become bigger problems. What is the root of the problem? Why do schools not pick this up? Are there too many kids in the class? Are they not looking for it? |
| Teachers see the product but may not see the process and the process shows that it may not have been easy or straightforward. |
| Hard in class for teacher to know what is going on in schools and teachers said not a problem. The parents knew there was a problem. |
| It is hard to spot problems. Schools do support if mothers are proactive or make a fuss. |
| Craig's mum maybe wouldn't make a fuss. |
| If the school gets the right culture involve children create ethos rather than have it imposed write their own policies. |
| Children know their rights but they must have a sense of responsibilities |
| Children need to know the boundaries, values and standards. |
| Things have to be two way. Teachers need support re inclusion. |
| Children get labels if expected he will become problem child. How to get teachers the time. Easier to concentrate on the majority. Craig problem easier to exclude. How can you get Craig to conform, as he doesn't want to? Maybe he will never conform. The system is set up for the conforming group to get the grades they need – able and poor's needs are not met – underachieving groups, all about %, schools are like a factory, they can't be processed as they are faulty goods. |
| A school can educate the majority of children to the best of their ability with the money available. |
| All kids have potential but how can schools know what that is. |
| Where pupils are not achieving their potential. I am not sure how good the school is at getting the parents involved. |

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| Something has gone wrong. On some occasions. Does B school sit down and say, 'Is this what we think you are capable of?' |
| Are excluded children counselled? It is like a prison. |
| Sum up |
| Craig and James |
| Important to identify children's problems early on. Why is there a problem? |
| James needs support from the school to do what he needs to do, speak to parents also. |
| James not a school problem. Give James confidence to stand up. |
| Craig should have been picked up at nursery school. |
| James – confidence, support from other members of the family. |
| Craig – speak to mother. Schools should be more confident about going to parents with problems and not just good news. |
| Craig – Parents need to know. Get more resources. |
| James – He has to stick by his guns. He has taken the first step by saying. |
| Craig – More investment for guidance and counselling. Pupils fail because they don't get the feedback they need. |
| James needs support from school. |
| Craig – Problem assaulting a teacher when provoked is o.k. Being excluded with no counselling is of no good. |

APPENDIX 5 - SCENARIOS

Scenarios were written to describe the outcomes of each of the focus groups. The headings used were those that emerged in round three of the fieldwork - Community, Relationships, and School.

Area F Secondary Teachers

The sample in this scenario was a group of three men and three women. Four of the teachers were subject specialists – English, mathematics, history and physics, one was the principal teacher of learning support and the sixth a principal teacher of guidance. This was a representative group of the school staff as it included subjects and welfare aspects of the school. The context of the study was explained and the vignettes presented. The moderator of the group asked each member of the group in turn to give their first reaction to the vignettes. There followed a discussion of the issues presented. The moderator ensured through time management, tone and people management that all were given an opportunity to speak.

Community

The group felt that vignette 1 was a too common scenario of the way of life in Area F. They felt that not achieving potential at school is really a cultural problem that isn't confined just to Area F but also the coastal strip around Area F and perhaps the coastal strip south of Area S. Parents they said have not valued education especially those involved in the fishing industry.

“Oh, I’ll just get into fishing, that will do us. They don’t seem to want to get an education first and see what that would do.”

Highers and Standard Grades did not make a good fisherman; the important thing was on-the-job training. One Teacher said that jobs used to be easy to come by and the rewards of the hard life at sea were a high standard of living in the main. Now it was felt that the situation has changed, folk were turning in their boats for decommissioning and although the fish processors keep going by importing fish this may not continue and:

“The jobs that used to absorb the kids when they left school may no longer be there in the future.”

The young people were seen as very parochial in Area F:

“Some haven’t been to Edinburgh and Aberdeen is a long way away.” One teacher said, “Until recently the names on the dux board of Area P Academy were to be found as teaching staff in the school. There is a familiarity they said with the comfort zone and breaking that pattern is something else.”

Children of the future they said will not have one job for life like they themselves had had, they will have several. The situation was compared to that of the Central Belt of Scotland after the closure of the steel mills and coalmines. At that time money was invested in retraining for different careers. The teachers felt this was needed now in Area F.

Relationships

The children, the teachers felt, are very well looked after, loved and cared for but as far as the schooling goes the time investment is not and has not been seen as a priority. It is a class thing they said really to do with the mother and the grandparents. They do not appear confident to value their child's education and thus do not invest in it. It may not be a formal decision but something made subconsciously. The extended family is also lacking now. The grandparents are out working and are not around so much and with changing lifestyles they have their own life and it does not always revolve around grandchildren.

School

The group felt that the present school system is letting down groups of children and the cycle has to be broken into. The children most affected in this way were seen by the group as particularly working class children. One teacher suggested that you cannot and should not expect a working class mother to nurture her child in a middle class way so you cannot expect a middle class education system to work for all. The education system has the child from the age of 5 they said and if it has not succeeded the system must be wrong for not having met the needs of the child. There is a tug of war between the home environment and the school. School has them up to 27½ hours per week and can do so much to modify behaviour but at 20 past 3 it is someone else's problem.

“If the issues are in the home background there is an action replay of the mother and the child is doomed.”

Breaking into the cycle in a town like Area F is difficult. An initiative on television where a working class boy from a socially deprived school was sent to a private school

as a boarder was discussed. Although at the end of the experience he did not want to stay at the public school the experiences he felt that he had gained gave him alternative scenarios for living.

There was a need they said to give pupils the opportunity to see life beyond the area. The old cycle they felt was now breaking. Children used to go to Aberdeen and come home for the weekends but now the small choice is Aberdeen or Glasgow, the big choice is whether the children stick in at school or not. An alternative for the Area F child was seen to send them to the College in Aberdeen away from his environment and peer group and offer him practically based subjects. On adapted timetables for difficult children, one teacher's view was,

“ We're maybe making life more comfortable for him or maybe getting him to come to school but are we addressing his current needs or his potential. He needs to be interested. In fact someone who doesn't want to learn won't learn.”

The peer group influences in school were discussed. One teacher suggested that moving a child to a different class could be a good option as working with a group who are achieving can turn someone around.

“I have seen it happen when pupils are put into a credit class, they often pull their socks up.”

“I have a bee in my bonnet about wasted potential and this is me. They throw everything away for short-term gain that they may live to regret. The boy in the vignette is the classic case of if only I had stuck in because two years down the line he's earning and he's trapped into the financial aspect of it and his future will be a repetition of his parents.”

Overall the teachers felt that the escape hatch has to be to get as good an education as possible and open up different opportunities for their future life.

Conclusion

The tone of the group was positive and indeed enthusiastic. All staff contributed giving each other the time and the opportunity to develop the issues. Some staff spoke more in the first half of the meeting but the quieter ones took the stage later on. The staff came across as a caring and concerned staff. The teachers' talked of, and appeared to have an understanding of, the changing nature and perception of the community and are aware of the future changes as a result of government policies on fishing. They talked a great deal about the lack of value placed on education by the core community and perhaps also their lack of understanding of the possible outcomes. They felt this needed to be instilled.

The teachers are aware that a middle class system of schooling does not fit easily with working class values, knowledge and understanding and also say why should it be so. They did feel that breaking into the cycle is difficult. The teachers had a metacognitive view of the educational position in Area F Area. They provided ideas for increasing opportunities for the young people:

- The idea that one need not bank education, there are opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Potential need not be measured in academic terms. All jobs should be valued.
- The need for a mentor and the importance of guidance, mentoring, careers and opportunities for work experience.
- Get him out of his environment.

In the non-formal discussion, the teachers present who originated as working class and did not follow the tradition of their parents and were working as teachers had children who did well in the education system, at school, at university and now worked in high-flying city jobs or the world of academia away from Area F. The parents (the members of the focus group) saw this as good. Did this give out a mixed message, a system of dual values or does it take a generation to move on in the education ladder?

Area F Primary Teachers

The sample for this group was the full staff except one at Area F Primary School including the head teacher. This totalled six women of various ages with considerable experience across all stages of the primary school. Area F School is one of the socially deprived schools in Aberdeenshire and has traditionally had an extra member of staff allocated to reduce class sizes. The sample was representative of primary school teachers in the local area schools, almost all female and advancing in years. The context of the study was explained and the vignettes presented. The moderator of the group asked each member of the group in turn to give their first reaction to the vignettes. There followed a discussion of the issues presented. The moderator was aware the head teacher was present and ensured that all were given an opportunity to speak.

Community

The discussion considered the cultural and heritage of the north east corner of Scotland. There is a tradition of following in father's footsteps both in the fishing industry and farming. Parents either were determined that you would follow them or make every effort that you didn't.

“I remember my mother shouting at my brother. This farm has been in our family for 250 years and you’re telling me that you want to go and do welding offshore. Now she’s saying that she wished she had let him do a trade as farming is quite a different ball game.”

“My father was a skipper. He was adamant that his sons would not go on the boat. He didn’t want to tie them to fishing or the northeast.”

If a parent is self-employed, has built up a business and finds the family are not interested then it was seen as very hard to accept that all your hard work will go to nobody.

“My husband will pass his views to my son. My mother-in-law says that the way to learn a business is to start from the bottom and work hard every hour of the day. Education is of no use.”

“My view is that you need to go into further education to meet other people, have other experiences, travel the world, appreciate other peoples points of view, other people’s lives and lifestyles.”

“My cousin has taken over his father’s farm but he has been 2 years in Canada and 2 years in New Zealand now he knows what he wants.”

“People are coming out of fishing and farming and diversifying.”

“My husband left fishing and can’t believe why he did it so long. If hard times hadn’t come he would have stayed in it for life. His grandfather said that he mustn’t go to sea. He obeyed him till he

died then went to sea. He now can see why his grandfather said that but he could not see it at the time.”

Relationships

Many in the catchment area of the school are unemployed and many have no desire to work. They appear to place no value on education. They do not attend any meetings regarding their children although all kinds of strategies have been tried. The values placed on education and the influence were discussed:

“One of my parents took her three year old to the local post office and said to the little girl, ‘this is where you come to get your pennies when you are big.’”

“A boy in Fiona’s class changed his family and changed his views about education. Nothing we could have done in school would have changed that for him so it’s a mixture of the supports that need to be in place. When the boy was with his own family, he was out on the streets and in trouble. Now he is with a family who views education positively and he goes to the museum, is learning to play a brass instrument, visits the library. It is all to do with parental values and attitudes. He can now see that the end is not the fish factory or the dole. He is talking about being a doctor, a couple of years ago that would not have entered his mind.”

They also mentioned from their experience how very able children with no support from home can fall behind middle of the road children with normal support from home when they go to the secondary school.

“I would be a nightmare parent. I would use bribery to turn my child around. I would visit different schools; I would ask him if

he wanted to be educated at home. But then that is all right for parents who have been through the education system and valued it. Most parents haven't taken the advantage of education and therefore don't see what it can do."

School

The disaffection happens all the time. It is not cool to study. The credit class is studious, the rest lose interest.

"I have a son who is now 16. At the academy he lost all interest. He did well all through primary school and got prizes. He was the brightest of my three and lost total interest in school because he is in the same class with this peer group. It's very difficult to get him out of the cycle. Jack the lad, he would show off. I would have liked him to come out of that class and try a different setting. I met the guidance teacher and the rector but he couldn't wait to leave. Maybe there is a lack of supervision at the secondary. At primary you know we really look after them and look out for them. Once in the secondary, there is not the same care or personal touch."

The pupils are really looked after in the primaries was reiterated by other members of the group. They spoke of how the self-esteem went up with the early intervention programmes where there are more adults with more time for the children. They go to secondary and they hit a lot of problems just with the different mixes they are in. There's not the level of cosiness where they know they've got someone to speak to them. A child with that security wouldn't allow things to escalate to 11 exclusions. The group suggested a mentoring system to be worth considering allowing children that personal contact and security; work experience; exceptional leave, anything to avoid

waiting for the gate to open at the age of 16. The group felt that one couldn't put one's heart and soul into someone else's dream. The world is one's oyster. Going to university can be for prestige or it can open the door to the future. Before that can be done minds have to be changed. To do that the school curriculum has to be right for all not just the academically able.

Conclusion

The tone of the meeting was open and very frank allowing the opportunity for discussion and even debate. All were given an opportunity to air their views and this they did. The Area F Primary Teachers had a clear understanding of the changing environment in the community and why. They talked from their direct experiences of life and their own perceptions of pupils who had passed through their hands through education valued eyes. The teachers understood there is another story to be told but a question had to be 'Do they know the story well enough to make decisions on the behalf of a whole community?' The group had a considerable concern regarding their pupils going to secondary school, which must appear big after the sheltered atmosphere of the primary.

Area B Secondary Teachers

The sample in this focus group was three men and two women. All of the teachers were subject specialists – English, physics, two from modern languages and drama. This was not representative of the whole school staff as there was no one from the guidance/pastoral side or learning support. The context of the study was explained and the vignettes presented. The moderator of the group asked each member of the group in

turn to give their first reaction to the vignettes. There followed a discussion of the issues presented. The moderator did ensure that all were given an opportunity to speak.

Community

When discussing cultural issues, some members of the group talked about family traditions. Vignette one had a parent who when young had become pregnant. The view of the teachers was that the mother was still developing when the child was growing up and that would likely have a part to play in the situation. She may or may not now be realising what she missed but not have the wherewithal to do anything about it. There was a discussion of farming traditions where education was seen to be valued; the young folk would go to Clinterty Agricultural College before returning to manage the farm.

Relationships

One teacher talked of parental attitudes regarding the seniority of subjects.

“Someone who was equally good in academic subjects and the expressive arts (drama) decided to opt for the expressive arts but the family said that she had to go the academic route or they would not support her. Drama was fanciful. She wasn’t going to challenge her dad any further on it. That was the end of it.”

School

The group felt that Area B Academy would be able to deal with a pupil with special needs (vignette 3) easily. They had had similar situations before and pupils made a success of it. The extent of the resources was seen as responsible for the success. However, one teacher said,

“I am totally opposed to giving people dreams that they will cope in the normal run of things. Most get over their problems as they grow up. If that doesn’t work think of something else rather than assume she needs a battery of special support. Inclusion can mean you are in the secondary school now and that’s that. It doesn’t mean you get an extra teacher or an auxiliary.”

“Our example is she probably achieved at standard grade very little but she integrated with the girls of her age. That in itself was worthwhile having her at the secondary.”

The main problem is seen if the needs of a pupil eat into the other children’s share of the teachers’ time disproportionately – there have to be balances. People who can progress without too much intervention in a way can donate time to someone else. When talking of the disaffected child (vignette 1), the teachers were of the view that a situation like this would not appear at this stage in Area B because it would have been picked up long before he was 16. For the disaffected child, the teachers said that it was the task of the guidance team to provide support, advice, mentoring and channelling etc. They suggested a buddying system where the boy could be matched to a member of the senior pupils or perhaps a member of staff. They talked of the role of guidance and considered how many pupils they should take charge of and of the amount of time a disaffected child took up.

The education in secondary school does not cater for the disaffected. The system works well for children who conform but not for those who cannot or will not conform. If there were practical subjects then such a child might be engaged but with academic subjects there is no hope. They felt that they really did not have anything to offer but then there

really wasn't a problem in Area B. The teachers talked of the aspirations of further education. There was a view that people decide very early on what they will do. One teacher said that her class group decided early in the primary that they would all go to university and that these aspirations didn't change for most of them. Overall, the Area B teachers took the view that the pupils should conform to the system and those who could not or would not, should be excluded but then it wasn't a problem in Area B.

Conclusion

The tone of the group was cynical and at times rude. One spoke in a derogatory way about people from Area F. All staff did contribute and there were opportunities to develop issues. The staff came across as subject specialists there imparting knowledge and understanding whilst the pupils conformed to the system. They talked of the values of educational attainment. They took the view of a school system and conformity to it.

Area B Primary Teachers

The sample in this group was six female primary teachers from Area B Primary School, one of the largest schools in Scotland. There was one promoted member of staff and five class teachers two of who were from the support for learners sector. They had a variety of backgrounds and experience of the age range. There is only one male member of the teaching staff but he was not part of the sample. The group was a representative group of the staff at Area B. The context of the study was explained and the vignettes presented. The moderator of the group asked each member of the group in turn to give their first reaction to the vignettes. There followed a discussion of the issues presented.

The moderator was aware that one of the management team commanded status and made an effort to ensure all were given equal opportunity to speak.

Community

There was much talk of expectations, aspirations and attitudes on education and how they might be upheld or changed. The primary teachers had an affinity with vignette 2 and immediately produced an example:

“I had a friend at school who was an only daughter. They had three farms. She wasn’t allowed to go to university because she was needed on the farm. Eventually, she was allowed to go and won prizes but when she was in 3rd year and due to go abroad, this was a step too far. She was told to stop; she was bought a Subaru and a flat. She went back to the farm, stayed a year then became a secretary. Now she is a PA.”

There was discussion around the cultural expectations and aspirations.

“Never underestimate the power of the family. The heritage and tradition, I have seen it all before. It is in my family history.”

“In the north east of Scotland there is the concept of the word duty especially in the farming industry. Elements of duty include carrying on the family business. You are disloyal if you don’t. Any family business is the same. My father was a chemist. There was resentment when none of the children followed on.”

“It is now more difficult. I have four sons and each have experienced redundancy. There is something to fall back on if there is a family business.”

“If you have a farm that cushions the whole thing.”

This, the teachers felt, would not be the pattern of most of the people in Area B so the children would be expected to build a portfolio of expertise and experience to tide them over in difficult times. The first issue is for the child to be able to stay on at school to do his highers. It was felt that if one doesn't stay on at school for highers, the road is much tougher and one can really struggle to get back on the conveyor belt of education. A degree they felt is a good base even although the degree may not directly give work opportunities. The wider education should be considered but this doesn't happen these days unless parents encourage them or get involved – sport, music and so on. These are often the social networks, which assist when making contacts for future employment.

“Two of my sons studied physics. They didn't have any problem getting jobs.”

“My son has a 2:1 in modern history and never got a related job. He is working on a help desk.”

Relationships

However, they said it must be remembered that the family is in control when you are 16 and that the children may have to adhere to the rules of the family.

“It is very important to have family rules. It doesn't matter what other families do. If you are part of this family you do this. It is difficult to stand up to them when they are 15/16 but it has to be said no this is the way we do it here.”

“Teenagers will always try to push you to see how far you will go. As parents you have to evolve your own rules. As parents you balance your expectations with what you want them to do.”

The discussion went on to discuss the question of expectations versus potential.

“Who decides on whose potential?”

“I had a son who went to Glasgow to do Computing and Maths and he lasted one year. He dropped out as it was completely the wrong course. Glasgow was looking for straight credit levels and he could not do that.”

School

The group felt potential is measured in academic terms and that this is hugely wrong. When parents seek advice from the school it is normally for academic success. Is that all parents or only educated parents was questioned and they concurred that a good number of local North East parents don't question. With the onset of league tables and attainment targets, the group saw education as very academic. A lot of the traditional subjects that used to be non-academic have become more academic as they have written papers. An example is physical education. They felt that it drifted that way because of the requirement for evidence. They asked if it has to be that way as it is excluding a whole set of children who were previously catered for. If there were practical courses then those who do not have high attainment in the academics would have the opportunity to succeed. The teachers felt that it is important that children are happy but as a school they did give the message of the importance of academic achievement when only one morning of drama a year is in the timetable. The teachers called for a broader definition of potential, a more holistic position.

Area B, they said, give status to academic potential but trades are seen as the next layer down. In the Antipodean countries, trades are equal value.

“One boy, I know is not academic so is withdrawing from his friends, distancing himself from them. His friends are academic

and will go to university. The mother is upset. They're calling for him but he's not going with them as he sees them as brighter than him. When they suggested he take up a trade he said no that was below him."

In the country as a whole, everyone's job is not valued. Practical skills are required throughout the country - plumbers, joiners etc. They can make a very good living because there is always work. The conclusion was that it comes from the government with the push, push, push for university. What is wrong with the university of plumbers?

"There was this lad that I knew. All that he wanted to be was a train driver. His family said that he had to go to university and then he could make up his mind. He still wanted to be a train driver. He would apply for posts but he was rejected because he had a degree and nobody with a degree would want to be a train driver. He applied for the job missing out his qualifications. He got the job. When the company found out he had a degree there was a bit of a fuss but he said that he was a trained driver. Has he achieved his potential? He is doing what he wants to do. For him he has achieved his potential, others may think differently."

To get over the chances of becoming disaffected, the group felt that there should be opportunities to be in the workplace without a commitment that they must take up employment thereafter.

"They leave school, they end up in the butcher's department at Safeways and say it is not fair that they have to get up early every morning and go to work. Their pals have holidays and can go out on a Saturday night. We didn't think that work was going to be like this."

There should be more relationships between the workplace and the school. There should be some system set up between the school and the workplace so that the child knows what is expected of him at work. It was felt that there is no real partnership between business and education: What does being a doctor mean? What does being a teacher mean? They don't know what these jobs are and if they want to go there it is a big step into the dark at that time. Familiarisation of what jobs involve should be built into the PSE curriculum. Guidance and counselling should start in the primary. Teachers try their best but with 30 children it is extremely difficult to take a keen interest in them all.

Alternative education was considered for the disaffected. Education units with different rules and a more relaxed atmosphere should be available. The disaffected, the teachers felt, often feel that they are too grown up to attend school to be told not to slouch, wear a school uniform or wear the correct trainers. They should be somewhere where it might be possible to meet expectations – their own expectations. They did not feel it was a big problem in Area B but they were sure it was elsewhere. Alternatives such as Operation Raleigh were put forward as opportunities for the disaffected as it puts them in a different environment and presents them challenges. It can make or break them.

Conclusion

The tone of the meeting was positive and enthusiastic, and ideas developed during the meeting. The group were enthusiastic in debate and discussion. The group came from a variety of backgrounds to Area B Primary and had a variety of perceptions. They drew on that experience for their discussion. The moderator felt that the group was able to take an abstract view of the concept of achievement of potential in the area. They were

able to talk of ideas rather than events or people and considered government policy and the resulting consequences.

Parents in Area B.

Two focus groups for parents were set up in Area B. Group one consisted of two men and four women and group two of six women. The groups included stay at home parents and parents in employment. A few of the parents belonged to the area while the rest had moved to the area. The parents in both groups had children across the nursery, primary and secondary sectors. The context of the study was explained and the vignettes presented. The moderator of the group asked each member of the group in turn to give their first reaction to the vignettes. There followed a discussion of the issues presented. The moderator ensured that all members of the group had the opportunity to speak.

Group 1

Community

Along the North East Coast the group felt that people are seen to be very local with a lack of vision.

“As part of my job I visit the chicken factory in Banff. The workers are mostly ex fishermen. College training in Aberdeen is available for them but they do not see its worth. It would take them outside their culture network. They believe that the chicken factory is a steady job with a steady wage so why risk doing something more demanding. The chicken factory could close at any time and these employees don’t appreciate that.”

“I came from Area K where there was a good infrastructure in the woollen mills. Look at that position now they are all closed. There was a them and us situation when I was young. Some were encouraged by parents to do well and aim for university. Others did not and are still there.”

“I lived in inner city Glasgow. I was encouraged to go to university. I lasted a year as it was outside my culture but then I went to be a nurse. Many of my friends are still there and it will be the same in 20 years.”

Most parents saw Area B as having a mixed social environment but one said Area B is no different from other places with a section that come with little aspiration.

“People come and say, I wish that I had stuck in. I wish that I had done more. I wish that I’d gone further. That is across the sectors and different organisations. There is the group who think that it is cool to gather down the road at the corners, become pregnant and get a house.”

Others felt that pupils could and do look at compatriots, see their own potential and decide to go for it.

Relationships

There was much discussion on the attitudes of the family. The group felt that what can make a difference is the presence of a father, the parents’ education, attitudes and values regarding education, and peer pressure. Members of the group said adults across society have to realise the impact they have on young minds, as they don’t take it seriously

enough. Teachers also have impact but for them it is a job. Adult influences are needed at an early age whether they are parents, teachers or other adults. It is no different in Area B they said than anywhere else. Parents must value their children for what they are, the parents said. People get so wrapped up in 'attainment levels' when they should be more appreciative of their children's talents no matter where they lie. There are the cases where children are pushed too far and have mental health problems. A lot of parents' expectations push children to the edge. Some children are not capable of achieving the parents' aspirations. It is the same problem as the disaffected only looking at it from a different angle.

"There was this boy I know. He worked hard at school and got the grades he needed to get into the university his father had gone to. He worked really hard and gained a 1st Class Honours. He didn't know if his parents would be pleased?"

"Parents need to be taught to be parents."

Parents said that there is a different level of respect by children for mums and dads. At certain ages, children have no respect for mums.

"Dad comes in and tells them to do it and they'll do it. Mum tells them and they argue."

"Area B is one of the largest schools in Scotland. There are classes of 30. Mr R, the head teacher is a man, the janitor is a man, and there is one male teacher. The rest are women. The parents who come in to help are normally women. Where are the male models?"

“That is interesting. We were talking of male input in the primary schools. Apart from the staff, the parents who come in to help in the library or work with successmaker are nearly all women. Children are easily influenced at this stage; boys in particular, need a male model so there is a need for more men in education. Children perceive education as mums doing it, women doing it. There is nothing cool about coming to school and learning, as they have no respect for mothers at this age.”

Schools need they felt to get fathers in to get them more informed and knowledgeable about what ‘their son in primary three’ should be working on.

School

The parents felt that there is too much talk of academic potential:

“If this guy wants to work in the chicken factory, good luck to him.”

Children should not be learning for learning’s sake they should be learning something that they are interested in. One parent said:

“I am really interested in the assessment of pupils. I don’t mean passing exams at critical points. I mean assessing the children when they go to nursery to see if they have special needs.”

Some of the group felt that in one of the biggest schools in Scotland, there is the opportunity to stream not for academic subjects but to meet the needs of children to identify what talents the child has, what sort of needs he has and how to meet them. A child very good with his hands and technically minded should be channelled. With a large number of pupils of the same age, there should be opportunities to assess what

they are good at, where their strengths are and where the development needs are then teachers should work towards meeting strengths and weaknesses with cross age and stage groups.

“There was a project in Australia for Gifted and Talented Education. There was mixed aged teaching, mixed aged learning. There were extra classes to accelerate learning. The system was more flexible.”

One parent suggested that the primary school is about the basic skills. All children should have targets set in conjunction with parents. Children shouldn't be made to read and write if they are not capable but also there are children of three and four who can read and they are not catered for. With a disaffected child it was seen that there must be a time when he could have intervention. This is the responsibility of the school.

“At 14/15 the children have short- term aims, leave school, go to Jim Thomson, and be earning next week. They don't think that if they stay on at school and then go to university then they might earn more money.”

“We are driven by money to buy nice things and have fine holidays. People might choose other things if they thought that they could have the lifestyle they want.”

Those who are not academically able or inclined do not have the opportunities, as there are no apprenticeships now. There is not the opportunity to have technical studies. The education system has narrowed. The group saw the need to develop a home school link with much more open dialogue, more access for mothers who have not had opportunities themselves. Some parents they felt do not have a clue how hard children must work in secondary school, that they need to do homework for two hours, that they

need a quiet room to work in where they are not disturbed. The children could inform them but it is not cool to say they are interested in working hard.

Schools it was felt don't cater for individual children so involving parents is really important. Parents should have more information on the attainment levels and what they need to know to make a partnership work. The problem is they said that some parents are not interested but a huge percentage is interested in becoming involved and they are very concerned about their children. The group suggested that employers should be encouraged to allow fathers take time off work to be involved with their children's education particularly at primary level.

Group 2

Community

The group felt that one of the dangers living in Area B is that it is easy to have a good life as jobs are in abundance with high levels of disposable income from the oil and gas industry. The young people do not know that if they do not work hard they are not going have the lifestyle. This is a minority the group felt but these people don't have any idea about the real world and trying to get through to them that things aren't like this normally is difficult.

Area B is seen by the parents to have a lot of middle class people who have expectations of university for their children but there are, however, a lot of people who have always been in the area and are not particularly ambitious. Girls are seen to be traditionally easier to handle than boys but a lot of 16-18 year old girls have low self-esteem, look for a boost, usually from a boy and very often end up pregnant. While middle class

daughters get pregnant and are embarrassed, with others it is cool to get pregnant when not married, to get a council house quicker, to have a nice life and to be looked after. This was seen as a reality and they brag about it.

The parents discussed the view that leaving school at 16 is failure. They felt that the key thing is to be happy.

“When a young person leaves the school at 16 it is seen that he hasn’t made the grade but if he has got a job, he’ll have more money than those who go to university, and if it is an apprenticeship, his job is guaranteed for four years so why should he be seen as a failure? It is very difficult to get apprenticeships these days. If you stay at school till 18 you miss them. An apprenticeship is best from 16, there is not enough emphasis put on them by schools.”

Relationships

Area B’s middle classes were seen to have high expectations of their children at school. There is a huge pressure that they will get highers and go to university. There is a strong expectation that the young will follow on from the parents and do even better putting pressure on the children such as to go to the same university as mum and granny. The group felt that:

“There are those that want the children to do like them.

There are those that want the children to do better than them.

There are those who say it was good enough for me so it will be good enough for you.”

“For young people the job has everything they want – clothes and food so they do not see the need for education.”

School

The system the group felt is set up for a conforming group to get the grades. The academically able and the academically poor do not have their needs met. It is like a factory. Some cannot be processed as they are faulty goods as they do not have the correct raw materials. The school system educates the majority of children in a conforming group to the best of their ability with the money available. The question was however asked whether Area B School sits down and considers:

“Is this what we think you are capable of?”

All children have potential but schools do not know what that is.

“I asked my 12 year old what his potential is. He had an idea. I asked if the teachers would know what it was. He said that they couldn’t possibly know as they would need to know him very well and they don’t.”

The schools can’t know the children well as it is a numbers game. Where pupils are not achieving their potential, the group were not sure how good the school is at getting the parents involved. It has to be a partnership, school and the parents, they who know the child have the best information, the teachers have information, and careers can offer information. Sometimes, parents don’t have strong enough information to influence a different pathway.

“We send our children to friends to discuss their jobs etc. There are lots of jobs we know nothing about.”

It is difficult to get into things without a degree but there are other ways of doing things. For some university is not the right thing. If you don't go to university it doesn't mean that you will not achieve potential. Mums don't want their children to go down the same route as they themselves did. They would prefer something better for them.

The group suggested that the young people should be active in their learning.

“My 12 year old can tell you very clearly what satisfies and dissatisfies him.”

They need to know. For some children academic courses are never going to grab them but vocational yes. School is not for everyone, as it doesn't engage them thus it is very important to be able to get them involved to find out other things. To raise expectations they should be taken out of their normal situation and placed in a new situation something different. Let them travel. Encourage them to go on activity weeks. They have maybe never been out of their local community. They should be given a picture of where they might ultimately be which is different to their local community.

The group said that boys take longer to make decisions than girls unless they are very clear about what they want to do and they felt few are. When they come to a decision on what to do it often isn't what they thought when they were 16 –18. The girls are much better at long-term thinking. The boys can't see beyond next week.

The group also felt the need to have good role models for boys. This could be teachers or someone outside.

“I don't remember ever having teachers as role models. I had one teacher who inspired and captured my attention.”

The group wondered about having successful business people in school talking about their work and where they travelled. This would show reality. They also valued the idea that those who had recently left school should return and tell of their experiences.

“My Craig 5th year has just had a talk by last year’s 6th years who have been on gap years.”

“Get the 16-18 year olds into school to tell the younger ones what has happened since they left school giving the downside and the upside.”

“A shop assistant’s wage may not be enough to buy a house.”

Children’s problems must be picked up early. Teachers see the product but may not see the process and the process shows that it may not have been easy or straightforward. It is hard the group felt to know what is going on. Schools and teachers say there is not a problem. Parents know there is a problem. It is hard to spot the problems and schools are slow to support if the parent doesn’t make a fuss.

If the school gets the right culture, involves the children, creates ethos rather than have it imposed, there will be success. Children know their rights but they don’t necessarily know that with rights go responsibilities. Children need to know the boundaries, values and standards. Schools should be more confident about going to parents with problems and not just good news. There should also be more investment in guidance and counselling.

Conclusion

The tone and quality of discussion in both groups were articulate, enthusiastic, and inquisitive and perhaps more formal than the discussion with Area F Parents. The Area

B Parents gave the impression that they had gone through the educational system themselves and they had wives and husbands at same level of understanding. The parents had a perception of their own area and that of the other areas and thus the North East of Scotland. They definitely viewed them as them and us. They talked about the role of women in education and in society and the attitudes towards them by the youngsters.

The parents wanted a role in education that gave them decision-making power in the how it is managed and what is taught.

Parents from Area F

Two focus groups for parents were set up in Area F. Group one consisted of five women and the second group consisted of nine women. The groups included stay at home parents and parents in employment. A few of the parents belonged to the area while the rest had moved to the area. The parents in both groups had children across the nursery, primary and secondary sectors. At each meeting the context of the study was explained and the vignettes presented. The moderator of the group asked each member of the group in turn to give their first reaction to the vignettes. There followed a discussion of the issues presented. The moderator ensured that all members of the group had the opportunity to speak.

Group 1

Community

The group felt that there used to be an expectation that sons would follow their fathers to the boats but things had changed in the last couple of years and the way it is with farming and fishing now the story is continuing to change rapidly. The living in the area was always fishing and farming but that is gone. There is tourism but that is the Council. Area F was seen to have gone down hill in the last five years. It doesn't help they said that there is bad publicity on TV. Some felt it was no worse than anywhere else; it was just the state of the buildings. People are perceived to be moving to the area because things are cheap. The English especially are moving but they are not working. There are however no jobs and no prospects. The folk at the College, they said, were not working in Area F. They just came because it is a good college then they go for a job further away. Two folk went to Germany for a better life.

"My mam says:

'My loon is not going to the sea, he is going to bide on dry land.'"

"My quinnie is 12 with a head of 17. She just hates school. What is her life going to be when she's 15? If you can't get into the fish factory what else is there – drugs, drink, get pregnant and settle down."

"People do go away now to England for a better life. There is nothing here now. If they have got the brains they go away."

"I know someone who went to college for five years in accountancy. She is working in Superdrug as she can't get a job.

I canna see the point of going to the college if they are not going to a job thereafter.”

Relationships

Mothers, the group felt must put in the time with children above and beyond feeding and clothing them. Families must value education otherwise the children won't think anything of school. One parent said:

“We believe education is the future and have a fund set up for the education of our children.”

The group felt the necessity to be strong on discipline is essential. When parents are out working all day, they are tired and just want the easy life. They give in to the children and give them the money. However tired, parents must prepare their child for education giving time for homework and listening to what is happening. In the end, if the child doesn't want to be there the parents can't lead his life for him, they can only encourage him and show him the way. The group felt that boys are particularly lazy.

“I've got a brother and he is six feet and he won't get out of his bed and go to work.”

“My brother lives with my mum and refuses to move out. He has his life too easy. He gets his £200 into his pocket. She does everything else.”

These folk, the group thought, could be looking for a male figure in their lives. They are trying to get attention. The group saw the father's role to very important – advice, homework, ask them how it is, always being there at bedtime. A male figure is needed to build a child's confidence. The male adult figure is needed there to have time for them, do things they want to do, teach them self-respect.

“Me and my son are really close but there are things that he does with his father, man to man. Now he is 27, but he still comes over and has a blether with his father. There are things that he will discuss with his father that he will not discuss with me.”

“In America, there was a project for boys whose fathers were not around. These were volunteers who might take one to the football or the bowling and give the young lads an opportunity to talk man to man. With the high number of single parents usually mothers this would be a good idea.”

School

It was felt that schooling really depends on the teachers - the attitude of the teachers, giving appropriate support and building confidence and providing the right curriculum. The most important thing they said is that the child is happy. The child needs to be with pupils who are of a similar ability. The group felt that these days there is a lot of support for children with special needs.

Grades are really important for parents but not necessarily for the child.

“My son was a nightmare in 1st and 2nd year. He had been at the North School and helped with the football. The first two years at the academy he had a horrendous time. Older pupils bullied him because he was a big loon. He rebelled and he hit back. I did something about it. It didn't matter he was 6'4" he was only 12. I was never out of the school whether that was right or wrong. You can't go through the school being a happy child then change. After one week at the secondary there was tears. You just couldn't let it pass. A lot of folk would just let it pass. It depends on yourself. You know your kids and you ken the life at

hame. Quieter people might just let it pass. The staff can be intimidating but you have to stick to your guns if it is something you believe in. I stuck at it till I got answers. We ken't right awa something was wrong. The guidance told me that my loon was a big loon and he could look after himself. I told them that it did not matter how big he was he was only 12. The 4th and 5th years were bullying him."

"The first week my kid was bullied I went to the guidance teacher. My quinnie was being bullied, she retaliated and I got a letter home to say that if she did again she would be excluded. It is one rule for one and one rule for the others."

The parents felt that they were not supported when they went to school. Excuses were made and if they did not keep going back and causing a stir nothing would be done. Parents know their children and there has to be some reason when one does not want to be in school. Teachers the group felt can be very superior, even intimidating and condescending.

Group 2

Community

The lifestyle pattern in the North East of Scotland has been traditional was the view of the group. The farmer's daughter marries a farmer's son; they live locally and have children to carry on the traditions. It was the same with fishing. The sons would leave school and go on the boat and the daughters would marry fishermen and stay in the community. They married fishermen, as there wasn't much choice. That was just what happened. No one did anything different from what the parents had done. Some

escaped to university then came back as a teacher, doctor or minister. Some escaped and never came back.

“My granny was out of school at 12 to help on the farm. Her father and two uncles were killed in the first war that was it. She left the northeast at 17, went to Edinburgh and never came back.”

“My family had three sons all grown up, the eldest one worked in the bank and supported the other two on the farm.”

“An’ yer loon’s nae takin’ the fairm on

an’ yer loon’s nae takin’ the boat on.

ye just dinna dae that.”

“I know someone who is waiting for the grandchild to take over the farm. His own children didn’t. The boy is young and comes at the weekend to help but the grandfather is looking for him to take over.”

“I know a farm where there are five sons. Only two are working on the farm. The farm is going to be left to them. There is no money so the other three will get nothing.”

The same story was repeated time after time. With the changes in the fortunes in fishing and farming, the group felt that this pattern had to change. Anyone who was clever now went away from Area F to the city for work and a better way of life.

Relationships

For many women work is the priority. Shifts at the fish factory are long but the pay is good. The last thing that they are interested in is homework and problem children.

They give them some money for a new game. The children eventually take the upper hand and hold them to ransom. Nowadays the group said, a lot of children tell the parents what to do and not the parents telling the children. With boys, there are a lot of hormones at 15 with a lot of things happening that they do not understand. Teenagers are hit with pressures when they are going through this period. The group's view was that there is a time to leave them alone and there is a time to discipline to say enough is enough.

“My step daughter age 14/15 said, ‘I won’t ruin my life like you did.’ Her mother had kept saying she had ruined her life.”

School

The group felt children need a good general education. Vocational education is very important and work experience would give young people the opportunity to find out the implications of working life.

“Work experience gutting fish might put them off for life.”

The group suggested that there should be visits from people from different walks of life to talk of their experiences. Folk from the extremes should be invited, an example being young offenders to let the young people know what the consequences are for deviation from the norm. An emphasis should be that they don’t have to do what others tell them, they need to think for themselves by making up their own minds. The group iterated more than once that the way to get young people to do things is to make them think that it is their own idea. Another way is to make a deal with their children.

Intervention for deviance must be early. The group said that in primary school they felt that they were well informed but that when it came to secondary school there was not enough feedback to parents. Although some parents might say it was the school's job to deal with the issues most would say they would want to be involved. The group felt that the pupils should be pushed more in education. They were of the view that parents should be more pro-active and pushy, in fact bypassing the child, if necessary. The group felt that some teachers were unapproachable and that pupils did not get on with them. The pupils chose subjects according to the teachers that they liked. If a teacher inspired them then there was an affinity with the subject.

In the end, the group felt that the child has to want to be educated. It is not what the parents want it is what the child wants. Parents and school can only push so far. They cannot impose what they want. What they do after school is really their own problem but if they have not got their exams it is really tough. The group thus emphasised the importance of the relationship with the guidance teacher. One of the members knew someone in the USA. There, the ratio of guidance teachers to pupils was much higher than it is Aberdeenshire. The teacher and the pupil meet weekly to discuss curriculum and pastoral issues. The issues are picked up earlier and the relationship is stronger. Maybe in the end they said the children need someone to sit down with them, find out exactly what is going on, what do they need, what are their goals and have strategies to make them think that is what they want.

Conclusion

The tone of one of the groups was quiet and thoughtful while the second group was loud, exciting and enthusiastic.

The Area F parents discussed how they perceived Area F. One group talked of tradition and how the same story was repeated time after time. The other group presented a bleak picture of the present and little hope for the future. Both groups were very concerned for the future of the young people, suggesting ways of preventing them making the mistakes of the earlier generations. Like the Area B parents they wanted involvement in the education of their child. They wanted acknowledgement from the school of who they were, a listening ear and an understanding of their child. They wanted their child and other children in the area to have the opportunities of education, which would meet their needs. In addition they wanted their children to have the support, advice and guidance to achieve their potential. Finally they wanted respect for their children.